PRICE 5 CE

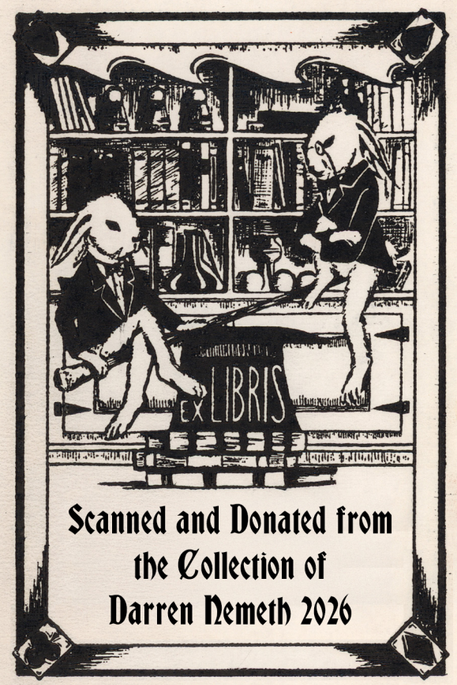
OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

No. 161 Price 5 cents

MADGE the SOCIETY DETECTIVE
EAR
"THIS NIGHT SHALL HER PROUD SPIRIT BE CRUSHED!" SAID THE BEAUTY WITH A SHARP, HISSING INTAKE OF BREATH

The ARTHUR WESTBROOK Company CLEVELAND U.S.A.

by "OLD SLEUTH"



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OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

A Series of

THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES EVER PUBLISHED

No. 161 | THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY, CLEVELAND, U. S. A. Published Weekly. By Subscription, $2.50 per year; $1.25 for 6 months. | Vol. IV

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Madge The Society Detective,

or

A Strange Guest Among The Four Hundred

BY "OLD SLEUTH"

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

MADGE NELSON—A brilliant and clever detective who works in unusual ways and accomplishes great things.
ARDMORE SANGSTER—A broker and millionaire.
COURTNEY SANGSTER—His wayward son.
ALICE VANCAMP—A beautiful and accomplished young society woman.
AGNES WARWICK—A thief by compulsion.
SPINDLE WARWICK—A deep-dyed villain and crook.

CHAPTER I.

AN INTERRUPTED RECEPTION.

"Miss Alice, won't you listen to me?"

Beautiful Alice VanCamp, society favorite, brilliant woman of the world laughed good naturedly.

"Am I not listening?"

"But," protested Courtney Sangster, "you do not listen in the right way."

"I do not?"

"You know you do not."

"How would you have me listen, then?"

"Seriously."

"Very well, now I am serious. See, I am listening. You shall not be able to again say that I have not given you serious consideration. You are such a serious boy, anyway, for——"

"There you go again."

"Pray, what have I done now?" pouted the beauty.

"A boy? I am no boy, I am a full-grown man."

She surveyed him keenly for one brief moment with a glance that seemed to shoot through the young man like a sharp weapon. What she saw was a somewhat boyish face that might have been handsome had it not been for certain weak lines, the natural beauty of the features marred by dissipation and excesses.

However, for all this, young Sangster, son of Ardmore Sangster, millionaire broker, clubman, yachtsman and promoter, passed for a handsome man. His manners were all that could be desired; that is, when in the society of his father and mother's guests or their proper circle.

For a long time Courtney had professed to be in love with Alice VanCamp. This gifted young woman was said to be the handsomest woman in the social set known as the Four Hundred. Left an orphan by a supposedly wealthy father some few years before, she had lived in the family mansion on lower Fifth avenue with a few old servants ever since. She was believed to possess a comfortable fortune.

Some said there was a mystery about Miss Van-

Camp, but it was admitted that besides being a brilliant woman, not a breath could be said against her. She was a masterful woman, and yet possessing all those delicate feminine ways that so endear a woman to the opposite sex. She was as dainty as she was beautiful, with a figure that artists raved over.

"Yes, you are a man, aren't you? Pardon me for not having observed this before. But you see we have known each other for so long that I still think of you as the child in short trousers that I knew, oh, ever and ever so many years ago."

The eyes of the the young woman twinkled merrily, all unobserved by young Courtney. His face was sour.

"You make me feel like a kid," he answered, petulantly.

"Why not leave it at that. Let's us forget that we are not children just for this once," begged the beauty.

They were sitting in the conservatory. The occasion was the wedding of Courtney's adopted sister Margaret. The latter had been adopted when a child, after the death of Mr. Sangster's only daughter, it was said, though there were few in the set in which the Sangsters moved, who possessed any definite knowledge about this phase of their lives. Margaret had been married at six that evening and the reception was then going on, one of those brilliant functions seldom seen outside of the great Metropolis, in this country.

Courtney's shifty eyes were glancing apprehensively out into the reception room where some of the younger set had begun to dance to the strains of the orchestra provided for the occasion. The reception proper had been interrupted by the dance, but the two young people in the conservatory appeared to feel no inclination to join the merrymakers.

"I do not want to leave it at that," replied Courtney in answer to Miss VanCamp's last question.

"Very well, being a man you have the privilege of suiting yourself, I suppose. This is a very enjoyable occasion. However, you will miss your sister."

"Yes, sis is a good sort, but she is a prude."

"A prude?" wondered the beauty.

"Yes."

"With reference to what?"

"She preaches."

"Well?"

"I don't like to be preached to."

"You don't?"

"No, I don't."

"Perhaps that is because you really need it. People object to having the truth told about themselves," she added, half maliciously.

He fixed his shifty eyes upon the young woman for a brief instant, then permitted his glance to fall to the floor of the conservatory.

"What do you mean by that remark?"

"You laid yourself open to the retort," she laughed.

"But you wished me to tell you what I meant. I have done so. Are you satisfied?"

"No, I am not. I should like to know what you meant by that remark?"

"About the coat fitting or words to that effect?"

"Yes."

"Let's not get personal."

"It strikes me that it is you who are indulging in personalities. I did not start the conversation in this direction, you will remember."

"Courtney, you are right. I beg your pardon. It was unkind of me. There, we will forget it. Am I absolved now?"

There was an irresistible sweetness in her tone. It brought a deep flush to the face of the young man. He raised his eyes to her face, holding her in one long, devouring glance.

The color slowly surged to the face and neck of Miss VanCamp, then disappeared suddenly.

"Yes," he murmured. "I could not deny you anything."

"You are very kind. Come, had we best not join the others? They will wonder at our absence. Even though we are old, old friends, people will wonder at our hiding ourselves away in this fashion."

"Not yet. I have something to say to you."

The girl sank back resignedly.

"I love you Alice!"

"What, again?" murmured the girl, half wearily.

"I always have. Ever since the days when you and I were little toddlers together——"

"Please don't go back into ancient history. It makes me feel old, an old woman," she begged with a short laugh.

"I tell you I love you. I want you, Alice. I never wanted anything so badly in my life. You always put me off in this way when I try to tell—when I try to tell you this. Why won't you be serious and listen to me?"

"I have been listening. It were better for you if I did not."

"Better for me?"

"Yes."

"No, it were better for me if you did."

Courtney was plunging ahead to his fate. He would not be warned. He was determined to possess the beautiful Alice VanCamp for his very own.

"Come, listen to me, ere we are interrupted, as we always are when I try to tell you of my love. I love——"

A woman rushed into the conservatory, interrupting the fervent declaration of love. Miss VanCamp breathed a sigh of relief. Then her beautiful eyes narrowed. The figure was all in white, a handsome girl, but whose beauty was marred by a death-like pallor.

"Margaret, what is it?" demanded Alice.

"Go away, we are busy, Margaret," demanded Courtney, petulantly. He did not observe that his adopted sister was laboring under a great mental strain at that moment. This fact had not escaped the keen eyes of Alice VanCamp. She saw at once that something was wrong. For the moment she forgot the very existence of Courtney Sangster.

"What is it, Margaret?" she repeated.

"I've been robbed," gasped Margaret.

"Robbed?"

"Yes."

"Robbed of what?"

"Of everything."

"Surely, it is not so bad as that," protested Alice. "Please be more explicit. What have you been robbed of?"

"My jewels!"

"Your jewels?"

"Yes," gasped the pale-faced girl. "My diamonds, all the beautiful jewels given to me on my wedding day."

"There must be some mistake about that."

"No, there is no mistake. Think of it, Alice, a half a million dollars' worth of beautiful jewels, all gone, all gone."

Margaret broke down and wept. Miss VanCamp turned to look at Courtney Sangster. His face was pale and the hand he raised to his forehead trembled perceptibly.

"God, that's hard luck," he muttered thickly.

CHAPTER II.

THE ROBBERY OF THE GEMS.

"The police must be informed at once," decided the young man with more decision than Alice had ever before seen him exhibit. Courtney rose.

"Wait," said Alice, laying a restraining hand on his arm. "What would you do?"

"Notify my father then call the police."

"And alarm your guests?"

"It can't be kept from them."

"It must be."

"Must be?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"You should know why, without asking that question."

"Margaret, have you told father?"

"Not—not yet," breathed the young girl tremulously. "I—I couldn't."

"Take my advice," suggested Alice, "say nothing about it to any one save possibly your father. You must not appear out in the other room. Come to your rooms and I will accompany you. After you have composed yourself we will send for your father, telling him all. Believe me, my dear, that will be best. Courtney, not a word of this until I give you leave," commanded Miss VanCamp with a strong note of authority in her voice.

Young Sangster had never heard her assume a tone like that before, and he glanced at the young woman in surprise.

"Very, well, if you think you know better about how to handle these things than I do."

"I did not say so. I know what is best for Margaret, and I know that a scene should not be made here. Think of the scandal that will follow——"

"You are right," murmured Margaret. "You are always right. That is why I sought you out. I knew you would know what to do."

"Courtney, go out and mingle with your guests. If any questions are asked about Margaret, say that she is with me, that I am assisting her in some matters that need attention."

Young Sangster nodded. He made no verbal reply. Now he stood watching the calm, resourceful girl to whom he had proposed only a few minutes before. He stood thus until Alice and Margaret had disappeared from view, then Courtney wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Instead, however, of going directly to the ball room, he stepped out on the veranda and walked off into the yard at the rear of the mansion.

In the meantime, Margaret had accompanied her friend up to the young bride's apartments. Margaret was all atremble.

"Now, Margaret, compose yourself. It will do no good to allow yourself to become so upset, and especially on your wedding night. What will your husband think to find you in tears?"

"Oh, Alice, I can't help it. Just think, all my beautiful jewels gone, gone——"

"Never mind, perhaps we shall be able to recover them. Surely the police will have little difficulty in recovering jewels of such great price. The thieves will have difficulty in disposing of them without attracting attention. Therein lies your best chance of getting your treasures back again."

"You make me almost believe you," answered the bride smiling through her tears.

"Believe me wholly. Now tell me all about it. Do so as quickly as possible, for we are liable to be disturbed at any moment."

"What shall I tell you? I have told you all there is to be told,"

"Oh, no, all you have told me is that your jewels have been stolen."

"What else is there to tell?"

"A great deal. Are you quite sure that they have not been mislaid?"

"I know they have not."

"Where were they?"

"In my jewel safe."

"Where was that?"

"Yonder."

A small, heavy iron safe stood at one side of the room. The door was open. In a center compartment where had been a wooden drawer or receptacle, Alice saw that the wood had been crushed in with some blunt instrument.

"Lock the door, Margaret," she said in a sharp, business-like tone.

The bride complied wonderingly. In the meantime Miss VanCamp had gone down on her knees in front of the open safe. With deft, careful fingers she went through the safe itself, then turned to an examination of the broken door of the inner compartment.

This done the young society woman cast a keen glance over the carpet in front of the safe.

"This drawer was locked, of course?"

"No, it was not."

"Ah!"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because the person who stole your jewels took for granted that it was. You are quite sure on that point, are you?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because whoever did this deed had been told that the receptacle would be locked and that they would have to break in the end of the drawer. Otherwise, any thief would have first tried the drawer to learn whether it was locked or unlocked."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, it is a fact, and we shall find it to be so when we get to the bottom of the affair."

"It all seems like a dream."

"The robber came here well prepared. He was well informed as to the lay of the land. How about your servants?"

"What do you mean, Alice?"

"Have they all been long in your employ?"

"Oh, yes, for a very long time, ever since I was a child."

"None of them could have had a hand in this, you think?"

"The idea is preposterous."

"That is what I think, Margaret."

The bride looked at her friend, wonderingly.

"You talk like a detective, Alice."

"You seem to know all about them," answered Miss VanCamp with a laugh, but her eyes were keenly glancing about the room taking in everything in quick, sharp, comprehensive glances.

Alice fixed her eyes on a door at the rear of the bride's chamber.

"Where does that lead to?" she demanded.

"To the hall way."

"And thence?"

"To the rear of the house."

"Remain here."

"Where are you going?"

"To look at something at the end of the hall," answered the society woman, slipping silently from the room, leaving Margaret wondering vaguely.

CHAPTER III.

BEAUTY ON THE TRAIL.

Miss VanCamp moved along the hall directly toward the rear of the house and though the doors of the rooms on that floor stood open, she did not even glance into them. The young woman seemed led by some inner instinct that was not of herself.

At the end of the hall on the right was the bathroom. To the left, as one stood facing the bathroom, was an open window.

Alice leaned from the window, to find herself looking down the sloping roof of an addition. For a moment she gazed out over the low roof, then turned to an examination of the window sill.

"It is here," she murmured scarcely above a whisper. "I felt sure I should find it here. It was all well planned and cleverly executed. I do not recognize the work at all. Well, it was fortunate that I was here and that I have had a chance to help my friends before the police came in to upset everything. I must go back to Margaret. The poor child is nearly crazed with her loss, and I do not know that I blame her. A half a million in jewels is a loss that would make me feel rather badly, I am sure." The words were accompanied by a quiet smile of amusement.

Miss VanCamp hurried back to where her friend was impatiently awaiting her.

"Where have you been, Alice?"

"To the bath room," answered the beauty, and with truth, for she had truly glanced into the bath room as she stood at the end of the corridor.

"I thought you were looking for something."

"I was."

"Did you find it?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"The bath room, dear."

Margaret smiled in spite of herself.

"You are such a funny girl."

"Yes, I should have made a great success as a humorist. I have often thought I might profitably have adopted that as a career. Who was up here besides yourself this evening?"

"Why, no one that I know of save my bridesmaids and the servants."

"Who of the servants?"

"My maid and the housekeeper."

"How along ago were they here?"

"I think when I came up after the ceremony. Why do you ask?"

"Merely my interest in you and your loss, that is all."

"Now I am going below. I will send your husband to you, through one of the servants. You are to remain here until he arrives. When he does tell him all. Don't break down and weep, but just tell him the facts. Have your husband see your father and bring him here, where your father will be told the story of your loss. That will be the best course to follow and the guests will know nothing about what has happened."

"You think of everything."

"So would you under ordinary circumstances, but you have reason to feel upset and excited this evening."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going down stairs for a few moments. I shall return. You may say to your husband and your father that you have sent for me. That will excuse me for intruding on your privacy when I return. But Margaret, be good enough to say nothing about my having been here, even to your husband for the present. You may tell him all when you are alone with him later on. I do not wish them to know of my apparent unusual interest in this affair. Not a word of it ever to your brother, only to your husband when the proper moment arrives."

"I will do as you wish," murmured Margaret.

"I knew you would, dear."

Miss VanCamp left the room, making her way down the staircase. Calling a servant she told her to inform Margaret's husband that his bride wished to see him in her apartments at once.

Having performed this duty, the society beauty strolled to the conservatory where, in the dim light, she stood surveying the gay throngs out in the ballroom. Her eyes were travelling over the assemblage, resting now and then on some face that seemed to claim her attention.

Alice's eyes lighted up and a smile suffused her face as she made out Courtney Sangster making violent love to a demure society bud off behind a spreading palm at the far side of the ball room.

"He is easily consoled," murmured the young woman, a sarcastic smile curling her lips as she noted the situation. She noted another thing, too. Courtney's face was pale and he appeared excited.

"I don't understand that young man at all. I have often wondered if he were not addicted to the use of some drug. I don't know what else would account for his erratic behavior. I am glad he is well out of the way. He was strolling out to the veranda when I went upstairs," showing that the young society woman used her eyes and her ears to excellent advantage.

Margaret turned suddenly and glided from the conservatory. Instead, however, of making her way out among the gay throngs she, too, went out upon the veranda. For a moment she leaned over the rail as if enjoying the fresh balmy night air.

Soon, she glided along the veranda with noiseless steps, holding up her handsome gown daintily that it might not be soiled by contact with the floor. Alice hastened down the steps with the perfect confidence of one who not only knew the way well, but who also knew where she was going and for what purpose.

Reaching the yard she hastened around the far end of the house after a quick glance about to make sure that she was not observed.

A moment later found her directly in the rear of the addition which so short a time before she had been gazing out over from the end of the corridor on the second floor.

That part of the rear yard was in darkness. A high board fence separated the yard from the adjoining one leading out onto another street.

After a brief survey of the surroundings, the handsome young society woman did a strange thing. She drew a dark object from her pocket and flashed a ray of light over the ground about her.

"Ah!" she muttered dropping to her knees. "I thought so."

A sheet of paper was extracted from some other part of that wonderful gown, and with it an exact copy of a footprint—of the shape of it—that she found there was made.

"I wish I had some plaster of Paris to make a cast of that," murmured the girl. "It is too bad, but I shall have to get along with what I have. I have made a great discovery. But what a terrible risk I am making. Ah, what is that?"

Alice crouched down in the shadows.

CHAPTER IV.

MATTERS GROW COMPLICATED.

"It is Margaret's husband," muttered the woman.

At that instant the gentleman halted in a listening attitude. It was evident that he realized some one else was near him.

Alice took the bolder course. Rising while his back was turned she walked toward the gentleman, uttering a merry, musical laugh as she did so.

"Why, Mr. Walker, are you out star-gazing instead of consoling your bride?"

Walker started. He peered into the shadows.

"Who is it, please?"

"Miss VanCamp, at your service," laughingly answered the young woman.

"And out here alone?"

"Oh yes, I am a poet by nature, you know. I love to commune with the stars, and you?"

"Perhaps I was imbued with the same motives. I came out here to think."

"Over the prize you have won? I do not blame you. Margaret is the dearest girl in the world."

"Naturally, I share your opinion."

"Have you been to Margaret?"

"Been to her?"

"Yes."

"Why no. I am waiting for her to come down."

"Then you did not get the message?"

"What message? I received no message," demanded Mr. Walker eagerly.

"A servant was asking for you as I came out. He said Margaret wished you to come to her at once."

The gentleman waited to hear no more. He started at a brisk walk, that was almost a run, for the house.

Alice VanCamp laughed softly.

"I wonder if he will be so devoted ten years from now. No, it does not last. There is an end to all things, love with the rest."

The young woman sighed deeply.

"Now that he has gone I will go on with my investigations. But I must hasten. There is no telling what Margaret will be doing if she finds no one is coming to her. But I wonder what Mr. Walker was doing out here?" mused the young woman thoughtfully. "Surely a strange mood to possess a man on his wedding night. Rather would he be waiting for the summons to go to his bride. It is a strange combination of circumstances all around, that I have been thrown in with on this night. Nor did I expect that my talents would be called into play. I came here for a pleasant social evening and now I find myself in the thick of a mystery that bids fair to be more than an ordinary mystery. Ah!"

Alice's exclamation was called forth by the sight of another figure in the grounds of the mansion. Like the first this, too, was that of a man. She could only make out the general outlines of the figure, but the young woman's shrewd eyes supplied what her instinct prompted.

"It is Courtney Sangster," muttered the young woman. "Now, what is he out here for? It seems as if the whole household had suddenly taken to star-gazing. I must confess that I do not understand it at all."

Young Sangster did not appear to be star-gazing. In fact he was standing with his back to Miss Van-

Camp, hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets gazing moodily at the ground.

The young man maintained this position for several minutes. Then, heaving a deep sigh, he turned and made his way back to the house.

Miss VanCamp was not far behind him. She made sure that she was not caught, but it was her desire to get in so close after Courtney that she would, for self-protection's sake, be able to keep him in sight.

This the young woman accomplished easily. One of the servants did see her entrance, however, but apparently set no special significance on the fact. Alice was so close behind the young man that one would have been led to believe she had entered with him after a stroll on the veranda.

Instead, however, of proceeding on to the ball room to join the merry throng there, the girl sat down in the conservatory where, screened from view by the tall tropical plants, she sat awaiting the moment when it would be proper for her to go back up stairs to join Margaret.

Meanwhile, Alice VanCamp was pondering over the strange combination of circumstances that had beset the Sangster household on that memorable evening.

"A quarter of a million in jewels gone," she murmured. "Quite a neat little fortune and I doubt not that there was more taken. A secretary in the room has been gone through hastily. It is reasonable to suppose that the thief also had information regarding the presence there of other valuables, perhaps money. I should not be at all surprised if such were the case. I must be careful or I shall direct suspicion to myself. That would not suit me at all. I cannot afford to expose my own hand, else my efficiency would be quite at an end. Then Alice VanCamp surely would have to go to work," added the girl with a grim smile curling the corners of her pretty mouth.

After a few moments of reflection the girl rose and made her way to the floor above. She waited at the head of the stairs to gaze down into the ball room, all unnoticed by the brilliant throngs there. Then she proceeded on to Margaret's room.

A half-timid knock was responded to by a faint, "Come in."

Alice entered. Her eyes rested on a picture. Margaret was seated on a divan her face buried in her hands. Before her stood Mr. Sangster and her husband. It needed nothing more than the serious expressions on the faces of the two gentlemen present to tell one that something serious had occurred.

"Did you send for me, Margaret?"

"Yes," came the sobbing reply from the hidden face of the young bride.

"I am here at your service. Why, what makes you all look so sober?"

Alice VanCamp was a privileged character in the Sangster home, where she had been a visitor for many years.

"It is not what one would expect on so joyous an occasion as this."

"Our joy has turned to sorrow, Miss VanCamp," answered Mr. Walker.

"Indeed?"

"Alice, something very serious has occurred here tonight," spoke up Mr. Sangster, turning to the girl.

"Something very serious?" wondered Alice innocently.

"Yes."

"You surprise me."

"Your surprise will be genuine when I tell you what it is."

"My curiosity is consuming me, Mr. Sangster."

"My dear, it is no jest."

"No jest?"

"No, we have been robbed!"

"Impossible!"

"It is true, nevertheless. Margaret can attest to the truth of that statement."

"This is most surprising. Was very much taken?"

"Quite enough for one evening. Margaret's jewels have been taken."

"Oh, is that all?" smiled the society woman, easily. "I thought something really serious had occurred."

Had there been no ladies present, Ardmore Sangster would have sworn. As it was he bit his lip until it whitened.

"I call it quite serious enough when more than a quarter of a million dollars in jewels have been taken."

"A quarter of a million?" breathed Miss VanCamp. "Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"It is enough. Why do you ask?"

"Because it struck me that perhaps something might have been taken from the secretary there. I observe that it has been broken into," answered the girl, calmly.

Margaret sprang up with a gasp. As she tore open the drawer gazing within she staggered back, half-fainting, into the arms of her husband.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SECRETARY.

"What is it? What is it?" cried the young bride's husband.

"It is nothing."

"Yes it is. I demand to know what it is that has so suddenly upset you again?" exclaimed the father.

"Some trinkets that I prized highly and a five-hundred dollar bill that you slipped into my hand last night, father."

Margaret's face was deathly in its pallor. Alice VanCamp eyed her keenly.

"I probed deeper than I knew," thought Alice. "I am sorry I spoke."

"Never mind, child," soothed Mr. Sangster. "There are other bills where that came from. We will forget it all. I do not wish you to be unhappy on your wedding night. No, you shall not be. Here, Walker, take your wife below. Her guests will be wondering what has happened to keep her from them thus long."

"No, I can't go just yet. I could not stand it to face them all."

"But you must," protested her husband. "Think how it will appear."

"Yes, you must hide your trouble and come below."

"Perhaps I can straighten her up," suggested Alice with one of her rare smiles. "I know how to bring the smiles to Margaret's cheeks, then I will turn her over to her husband. He will continue the good work, I am sure."

Mr. Walker flashed a keen glance at Miss VanCamp, but her face revealed nothing of what was in her mind.

"Very well. Your plan is a good one. I am glad you are here tonight, Alice. You always are so self-reliant. We have learned to depend upon you. I want to speak with you when you have gotten Margaret back to her old self again."

Alice nodded.

"We shall be down to join you in a few minutes."

The gentlemen left the room almost at once. Once outside, they began discussing the strange robbery which was a mystery that neither man was able to solve.

In the meantime, Alice stood looking down at her friend.

"Why—oh, why did you do it?" murmured Margaret.

"Why did I do what?"

"Why did you speak of the secretary?"

"Was there anything so wrong in that?"

"Oh, you don't know."

"No, I don't know, but perhaps I might make a shrewd guess."

Margaret glanced up at her friend with a half frightened expression on her face.

"You—you guess?"

Miss VanCamp nodded.

"What do you guess?"

"That yonder secretary held a mystery. It was not the loss of the money that caused you to nearly faint—no Margaret, it was not that. I have no desire to pry into your private secrets. But if there is anything you want to tell me, you know I am your friend."

"I can't, oh I can't," wailed the stricken bride. "It is too terrible."

"Look here, Margaret, I cannot believe that your honor is in any way compromised by what that secretary contained. If so, in any event, I have but one suggestion to offer, tell your husband all, tell him everything."

"I can't, oh, I can't."

"Then tell me. I have no doubt I shall be able to straighten the tangle and set all to rights. This is no way for you to act on your wedding night. It is shameful. Think of your husband."

"I do, that is why I cannot tell you nor him."

"Very well, if that is the way you look at it, matters will have to remain as they are. But I warn you, you are laying up great unhappiness for yourself at this, the beginning of your married life. It is wrong. You will regret it. But whatever you may have done, I propose to stand back of you and do for you what you refuse to do for yourself."

"You cannot help me. How can you help me?" demanded the bride, looking up with a hopeless expression on her face.

"That is for me to decide. Go on, enjoy your honeymoon and perhaps by the time you return I shall be able to return those precious——"

"Precious what?"

"Oh, whatever it may be," laughed Alice.

"I don't understand you at all, Alice. You are a strange woman. You do and say such strange things that at times I am almost afraid of you."

"You need have no fear of me. I am wholly and shamefully human just like yourself. But, dear, I do not like to see my friends suffer when I know that I can help them."

"I wish I were dead," wailed the girl.

"Now that will do. Get up, bathe your face, then stand before the mirror and straighten your face. That is the way actors do when they are getting ready to go on, you know. Mold their faces into those of the characters they are about to play."

"But this is a tragedy," protested Margaret.

"No, this is a comedy. You are about to go on in the character of the deliriously happy bride and you are going to carry it off in a way that will make me proud of you. What time does your train leave?"

"At midnight, I believe."

"You have two and a half hours yet, then."

"Yes. I shall be glad when it is over, when this strain is off my mind. I shall be glad to get away from this terrible house."

Miss VanCamp looked her surprise.

"You have not been happy here, Margaret?"

"Oh, please do not ask me."

Alice gripped the arm of her friend and led her to her dresser.

"Now get busy before I take matters into my own hand. I shall not let you move from this spot until you have made yourself presentable and have made up your face into that of a happy bride."

Margaret stood surveying herself in the French mirror for a full five minutes, now and then stealing a glance at the figure of Miss VanCamp reflected in the same glass just behind her.

At last a faint smile rippled over the pale face in the mirror, then a spot of color appeared.

"That's right, my dear. You are doing splendidly. You are really beautiful now. I feel sure that your husband will fall in love with you all over again when you go down stairs. I have never seen you look so lovely. You have magnified your troubles, but they are disappearing now like a mist before the morning sun. There. Straighten your hair at the back and you will be ready to make your second appearance this evening."

"You are splendid, Alice," muttered the girl. "What a wife you would make for some man."

"Yes, perhaps for some man. But some man never has asked me," laughed Miss VanCamp. "I do not expect that he ever will. In fact I am not sure that I should accept him if he did. Men do not want to marry me."

"I know some who would like to?" retorted Margaret, with a touch of the old spirit.

Alice did not ask who the men were to whom her friend referred. Perhaps she knew without asking. A faint smile curled her lips.

"Are you ready, dear?"

"Yes."

"Remember your lines."

"What do you mean?"

"Remember that you are the happiest girl in New York at this minute."

"I shall try to," answered the bride, faintly.

"You are. And you are going to be. Remember, too, that your husband is entitled to your brightest, happiest mood on this of all nights. Come, dear."

CHAPTER VI.

THE INTERVIEW WITH THE BROKER.

"Here we are," announced Miss VanCamp, brightly, as the two young women approached Mr. Sangster and his new son-in-law.

The two men turned to meet the smiling, happy face of Margaret Walker.

"You are a dream," breathed the girl's husband with glowing eyes.

"Thank you. I made a silly exhibition of myself upstairs, but I am myself again. Have our guests asked any questions."

"No, love. Come we must speak with some of them."

Margaret linked her arm within that of her husband and the two moved across the brilliantly lighted ball room, the envied of all eyes, for they made a very handsome couple.

Miss VanCamp in the meantime had discreetly dropped into the background.

"You are a wizard, Alice," said a voice at her side.

The young woman turned to find herself face to face with Ardmore Sangster, who was gazing at her admiringly.

"I wish I were," laughed the young woman.

"It isn't necessary to wish. You already have gotten your wish. I am happy that you are here tonight."

"Have you told Mrs. Sangster?"

"No, not yet."

"That is wise."

"So I thought. It is unnecessary to disturb her tonight, at least not until our guests have left."

"Wait until tomorrow," advised Alice, wisely.

"I think I shall take your advice."

"It would be best, if you will pardon my saying so. I seem to be interfering with matters that do not concern me, altogether too much this evening," smiled the girl.

"I do not know what we should have done without you. Come into the conservatory, we can talk there without interruption."

Miss VanCamp obeyed without a word. The couple seated themselves where Alice and young Courtney had been sitting earlier in the evening.

"Alice you have a wise little head on your shoulders. You are one of the most remarkable women I have ever known."

"Thank you, sir. You are very complimentary."

"I mean exactly what I say. What do you think of this affair?"

The girl elevated her eyebrows ever so little.

"What do you mean Mr. Sangster?"

"What do you think of it?"

"I think there has been a robbery committed," replied the girl, with a twinkle.

"Come, be serious. You are a shrewd observer. You ought to have been a detective. I have said it before. You would have been a wonder had you adopted that profession. I was speaking of you to a detective friend of mine some time ago, and saying just what I have told you tonight."

"May I ask who this detective friend of yours is?"

"His name is Jeff Clayton, have you ever heard of him?"

"Yes, I have heard of him," replied the girl, the suspicion of a smile lurking about the corners of her mouth. "I understand he is a most remarkable man."

"He is more than that, he is a marvel."

"Why do you not get him to take up this mystery of the robbery?"

"Unfortunately, Jeff is not in the country at present. He is in Europe on some mysterious mission. But to return to the original question, how did you ever deduce that Margaret's secretary had been broken into?"

"Oh, that is my secret," laughed the girl. "I never speak of my methods, you know."

"We will not discuss that phase of it, then. What I want from you is advice."

"Advice?"

"Yes."

"But surely you do not need advice from me. You are better able to decide what is best to do, than am I."

"What would you do, were you in my place?"

"Were I in your place, I undoubtedly should send for the police."

"That is what I am going to do."

"But, were I in your place, I should wait until the guests have departed, for the police do make such a stir when they come to a place. They seem to want every one to know they are about, and as a rule, everybody does know."

"Yes, the guests will be going very shortly. But you have not told me what you would do were you in your own place instead of mine?" questioned the broker, shrewdly.

Miss VanCamp laughed.

"I didn't give you credit for it, sir."

"Credit for what?" he demanded, bending a keen glance upon her.

"Oh, never mind. I should not send for the police, to answer your question."

"You would not?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I might be silly enough to think I could work up the case myself."

Mr. Sangster laughed heartily.

"I haven't the least doubt in the world that you would do that very thing. However, keen as you are, I think you would find that this mystery was too much for you."

"Perhaps," answered the girl dryly.

"I wish, however, that you would go over it in your mind. If you will drop around tomorrow I will meet you here at two in the afternoon and go over the situation with you. You see, I place great reliance on your judgment. I know of no other person who is so well fittted to give advice as yourself."

"You overrate my ability, sir."

"I think not."

"Very well, I shall be glad to meet you as requested, but it will not be at all necessary, so far as any investigation of our own is concerned."

"Not necessary?"

"No."

"And why not?" demanded the broker in surprise.

"Because I already have made an investigation on my own account," replied the girl with a soft laugh.

"You have?"

"Yes."

"And did you learn anything?"

"Perhaps."

"You amaze me."

Miss VanCamp was looking off toward the ball room with a faraway expression in her eyes. The girl seemed to be looking far into the future as it were, trying to pierce the veil that enveloped the mystery.

"What did you discover?"

"I cannot tell you all," answered the girl in a low voice. "I know how the crime was committed and perhaps something of the motive that prompted it. I might name one of the participants in it, though I shall not do so. It would not be best at this stage."

The broker stared with amazement unable to speak for the moment.

CHAPTER VII.

THE POLICE GET BUSY.

"Alice, as I have said so many times before, you are a strange and remarkable girl. Do you still advise me to send for the police?"

"Most certainly. What else is there for you to do?"

"True," muttered the broker thoughtfully. "And will you tell them what you suspect, what you have learned?"

"No, at least, not yet."

"Do you not think it is your duty to do so?'

"I owe no duty to the police."

"But in the interests of justice—in the interest of your friends."

"Permit me to serve my friends in my own way. There are some things you do not understand, Mr. Sangster. All may be made plain in time. Let the police come, give them all the data you have and set them at work. Perhaps they may recover the jewels, who knows. Stranger things than that have happened within even my recollection," added Alice, with a touch of sarcasm in her voice.

Mr. Sangster laughed.

"It shall be as you suggest. You will remain with us until I report?

"That depends when you do so. I certainly shall not remain after the guests have departed. What would people say? No, I think perhaps you had best see them alone or in the presence of your wife."

"She is not to be told, you know."

"Why not—but never mind."

"Say it, please."

"I was going to suggest your driving to headquarters, but that would not simplify matters any, as the police will wish to make an investigation here at the house."

"Yes. I think I shall send for them now," said the broker with emphasis.

Rising he hastened to his library where he telephoned the chief of police with instructions how the men who came in answer to the summons, were to enter the house so as not to attract attention. This was in compliance with a suggestion on the part of Alice.

Half an hour later, a lieutenant and two plainclothesmen entered by way of the basement door. The lieutenant was in citizen's clothes, also, and the other two did not look like the ordinary sleuths. Each was in full evening dress.

Miss VanCamp nodded her approval of this when she set eyes on them.

"If only they knew how to wear the clothes it would be all right. However, few men know how to wear evening dress well. It is an art——"

"Alice, I wish you would come to the library with us. I want you to hear all that passes. I have told Mrs. Sangster that you are going to do so, that we are to discuss some matters relating to the house with a couple of gentlemen, so nothing will be thought of the matter."

"I will go to the library in advance. You beg me to stay. That will be more natural."

OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY.

He at once saw the point of her shrewd plan and nodded his approval. So that when the broker and the three officers entered the library, Margaret was found lounging over an album of foreign photographs. She glanced up rather apprehensively. Then, when she saw Mr. Sangster was accompanied by three men, the girl rose hastily as if she would leave the room.

"I pray you be seated, Margaret," said the broker with a wave of the hand. "Gentlemen, this is Miss VanCamp a very close friend of the family who is even more conversant with this affair than am I. It might be advantageous for you to ask her some questions, which I am sure she will be very glad to give."

"Certainly, if I may be of assistance," answered the girl with one of her rare smiles.

"It seems to me that I have met you before, Miss VanCamp," said the lieutenant. "But, somehow, I cannot recall it."

"Quite possibly." The girl drew herself up with a slight gesture of indifference.

Mr. Sangster started in to relate all that he knew of the robbery, to which the police listened attentively.

"How much were the jewels worth?"

"Something more than a quarter of a million."

The officers exchanged meaning glances.

"Where were these jewels kept?"

"In a safe in my daughter's room."

"Shall we visit the scene?" suggested the lieutenant.

Mr. Sangster rose, leading the way.

"Come, Alice," he said. "I want you to accompany us."

The girl did so with evident reluctance. These men did not interest her. She knew them almost as well as they knew themselves and she knew their methods fully as well.

The officers took a keen survey of the room, examining the safe much as the young woman herself had done. They went about it in a very professional, self-confident manner that made Miss VanCamp smile to herself.

"Who was on this floor during the evening?" demanded the lieutenant.

"I shall have to ask my daughter."

"Your daughter said her maid and the housekeeper were the only persons up here," volunteered Alice.

"Then we shall have to see the two later. May we see your daughter?"

"Certainly not. This is her wedding night. Besides it is not at all necessary. We are able to say all that she would say and more."

"Was anything else taken?"

"Some money belonging to my daughter, I believe. It was a small sum."

"How much?"

"I think something like five hundred dollars."

The lieutenant grunted.

"Where was it?"

"In the secretary yonder."

The officer made a quick examination of the secretary.

"Anything else?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"Are you keeping anything back from us, Mr. Sangster?"

"What do you mean by that remark, sir?"

"I mean, is there anything further that might en-

lighten us, perhaps matters of a personal and family interest?"

"You have been told all that we have to say," answered the broker sharply. "There are no skeletons in this family, needing to be hidden away."

"No offense meant, sir, I assure you."

"I should hope not."

The two detectives had been sitting side by side on the divan in the room while their superior had been carrying on the conversation. The two detectives' faces had assumed a most mysterious and knowing expression. Miss VanCamp, as she surveyed them from beneath half-veiled eyelids, could scarce repress a laugh.

"It is ludicrous," she murmured.

Every now and then the lieutenant would glance in her direction with a puzzled expression in his eyes, as if he were trying to recall something in connection with her. His memory was elusive, he could not place the beautiful but tantalizing face before him. In fact, he was sure that he never had seen the face before, yet there was an air, an atmosphere about the young woman that appeared to arouse some seemingly long-forgotten memory in the little police officer. She saw and understood.

"Well, sir, do you wish to make an examination of the house?"

"Oh no," answered the lieutenant, promptly "We have learned quite sufficient as it is."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"Then what is your conclusion?"

"That this is an inside job!"

"Meaning?"

"That we may look for the robber in this very house. Call on your servants."

CHAPTER VIII.

EXAMINING THE SERVANTS.

Mr. Sangster's face flushed.

"It is preposterous!" he exclaimed with some heat.

"That is what people always think. You will find that I am right."

"And that one of my household committed this crime?"

"There can be no doubt of it. You see how impossible it would have been for a second-story worker to make his way up here and get into this room without detection. Besides, who would have known where the jewels were, unless it were a servant? The case is perfectly plain. We shall have the jewels before another twenty-four hours have passed, if not sooner, believe me, Mr. Sangster."

Alice's lip curled. The broker's face was still red.

"I shan't submit to anything of the sort. My servants are beyond reproach."

"You will have to submit, sir. The matter is now in the hands of the authorities."

"I think the lieutenant is right regarding his rights, sir," interposed Alice. "Let him talk with them at the proper time. I am sure he will be convinced of their innocence."

"Very well, if you suggest it. Go ahead, lieutenant. But hold—you cannot do that until the guests depart."

"Very well. We shall set a watch to see that none of the servants communicate with outside parties in the meantime. Where are the servants' quarters?"

"On the upper floor."

"See that none of them go to their rooms within the next hour."

"Very well."

The party retired to the library, that is, all but one did. One of the detectives, at a signal from his chief, dropped behind unobserved by any save Alice. She saw the move and understood. The moment he found himself alone the detective hurried to the top floor where he began a systematic search of the rooms of the servants. He was engaged in the task for an hour, after which he, too, descended to the library.

At midnight the bride and groom took their departure amid shouts and merry laughter, then the guests followed rapidly.

As soon as they had gone, Mr. Sangster took his wife aside and explained what had occurred. It had been made necessary by the determination of the lieutenant to examine the servants. This was done in the library.

One after another of the household servants appeared before the police officers, trembling, frightened and halting in their speech. Did appearances count for anything, one would have thought every one of them had had a hand in the robbery.

The lieutenant appeared to center his attentions on the maid, who had not accompanied her mistress. The maid was French. Her name was Mlle. Corinne. The officer left her until the last, until he had examined all the other servants singly.

"After dressing your mistress what did you do?" questioned the officer.

"I remained in the room to put away her wedding gown, monsieur."

"How long did you remain in the apartments?"

"I did not look to see. I should say about twenty minutes, monsieur."

"Who was with you?"

"I was alone."

"Who did you see while you were in the room?"

"I saw no one."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Now Corrinne was the safe open or closed at the time?"

"It was closed."

"Ah, you looked at the safe then?"

"I saw that it was closed."

"Did you know the jewels were in the safe?"

"I put them there, monsieur."

"Now we are getting at something real," declared the lieutenant, rubbing his hands together. "Did your mistress see you place them there?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Did you lock the drawer?"

"No, I had not the key."

"Where was the key?"

"Madame had misplaced it, she said. She said it would not be necessary to lock the drawer as she would take the gems before her departure this evening."

"Then the drawer was open?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And anyone could have helped themselves to the jewels in the box?"

"I suppose so."

"Did any of the other servants know of the presence of the jewels?"

"I do not know. I think not, monsieur. No other servants came to madame's apartments, unless, perhaps, the housekeeper."

"And she was not in the room after that?"

"I did not see her here."

"Now miss, I know you are keeping something back from me. You might better make a clean breast of what you know about this affair. It will be much better that you do."

"What does monsieur mean?" questioned the girl, looking the lieutenant squarely in the eyes.

"I mean that you can help us to unravel this tangled skein if you will do so. You are making it necessary for us to adopt more stringent measures by your evasion."

The girl went white.

"Does monsieur mean that I—that I took the jewels?"

"Oh no, I have not said so. We are trying to find out who did, and when we do, the one who has helped us will be favored. Corinne, who took those jewels?"

"I do not know, monsieur."

"You mean, you won't tell whom you suspect did?"

"I do not know."

"Who is your friend?"

The girl colored.

"Ah! I see we are getting at something. Put on your things, miss."

"What does monsieur mean?" questioned the girl tremblingly.

"That you will have to accompany us to headquarters," answered the officer, sternly.

"I protest. This is an infernal outrage!" exploded Ardmore Sangster.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ARREST OF THE MAID.

"I shall have to be the best judge of that, sir," answered the lieutenant. "Will you be good enough to call a carriage? Corinne, have some one fetch your things and we will be going."

The girl burst into tears, burying her face in her hands.

"Oh, monsieur, believe me, I never did the terrible thing," she pleaded, turning to Mr. Sangster.

"I am satisfied that you did not, Corinne."

"Then save me, save me," begged the maid, piteously. "I shall die of shame and grief."

"Have patience for a little while, child. I shall see what can be done. I have no doubt that matters may be arranged so that you will be back here before the night is ended. It is all a terrible mistake—a beastly blunder. I am ashamed of my part in it, but at the moment I am powerless to help you. Lieutenant, is there no way—can not I give bail for the young woman and spare her this humiliation?"

"That matter lies wholly with the court. You will have an opportunity to make application in the night court. I have nothing to do with it. Come, girl, are you ready?"

Corinne did not answer. At a signal from the lieutenant, his assistants took each an arm of the stricken maid and led her away.

"I bid you good night," said the officer, nodding as he left the room.

"Well, Alice, we have gotten ourselves into a nice mess," broke out Mr. Sangster, after a moment of silence.

"You mean we have gotten the maid in a mess."

"Yes, and I think you ought to have come out and told what you knew of the matter."

"What good would that have done?"

"The girl would not have been arrested, that's what good would have been done. It is an outrage."

"I agree with your last statement, but not with the former."

"How so?"

"The lieutenant would have arrested the girl just the same. He had made up his mind to do that before he saw her. I observed that early. I knew he had settled upon her as the victim."

"But she never did it."

"Of course not."

"He knows she didn't."

"He probably has made himself believe she is the guilty one."

"What can we do?"

"Engage a lawyer and have him make application for bail pending trial, or pending the grand jury's action. I hardly think she will be admitted to bail. The offense is too great a one for that. However, we shall have the girl out in good time."

"I do not see any prospect of it. Matters look very dark. This has been about the worst evening I ever put in in my life."

"I will see what can be done."

"You?"

"Yes."

"What can you, a woman, inexperienced in the ways of the world, hope to accomplish?"

Alice laughed softly.

"If I remember correctly, it was but a short time ago that you were telling me what a really remarkable person I was. Have you changed your mind so soon?"

"No, but this is different. This is a man's affair, not a woman's."

"Only a woman's work?" repeated Alice absently.

"Yes. What would you do were you to act?"

"I should get the best private detective whom I could employ and have him work up the case."

"I know of none save Clayton, and he cannot be gotten."

"Perhaps I might be able to find some one for you," suggested the girl meekly.

"You?"

"Yes, why not?" demanded Miss VanCamp.

"Do you know any detectives?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"I can't tell you now."

"You can't tell me?"

"No."

"And why not—why all this mystery?"

"Mr. Sangster, I have my reasons and they are good reasons. But I have a friend, a detective whom I am sure would be just the person to run down this crime. I have implicit confidence in the ability of this person to do all that I have promised."

"You surprise me."

"This detective friend of mine is somewhat peculiar—I might say that this detective has certain peculiarities. The detective always works secretly. The detective never comes in contact with the person whom he is working for until perhaps the case has come to a close, and not always then."

"This is very strange."

"It would appear so to the uninitiated."

"Do you mind giving me the name of this wonderful person, in the strictest confidence, of course?"

"I am not at liberty to do even that, Mr. Sangster."

"Most pecuiliar, indeed. I do not know what to say."

"Why should you say anything? Leave the management of the entire matter to me. I will make all the arrangements. From time to time I may be able to report progress to you. In any event the detective can do no more than fail."

"No, that is true. You are a strange girl, Alice."

"So you have said before."

"How much money will this friend require to start the inquiry going?"

"None at all."

The broker gazed at her in perplexity.

"I will confess that I don't seem to get hold of the thing at all. However, I am going to take you at your word. Set this human sleuth hound on the track and if he is successful, I will reward him handsomely."

"Thank you. He will be pleased at that, though I am not so sure about his being willing to accept any reward from *you*. Do not employ any one else. Let the police go on in ignorance of the fact that any one else is working on the case."

"When shall I see you again?"

"Oh, frequently. I am afraid that I shall have to cancel my engagement with you tomorrow. I shall be rather busy. You will hear from me soon."

"Very well, Alice. As I have said before, I do not understand you at all, but somehow, I seem to feel instinctively that you know what you are talking about."

"Good night," said Miss VanCamp, rising and extending a hand to her host.

CHAPTER X.

THE SOCIETY DETECTIVE AT WORK.

Alice VanCamp was none other than Madge, the Society Detective, known as Madge Nelson, one of the most brilliant and clever detectives in the great Metropolis.

Alice, upon the death of her parents, found her father's affairs in such bad shape that she realized the necessity of at once doing something for herself. She was proud and it was her ambition to retain the family name and the old home on lower Fifth avenue, unsullied.

With that in view, the young woman cast about for something to do. Crime and criminals had always held a strange fascination for her. In fact, it had been one of her hobbies to study crime. She began with following the crimes as reported in the daily papers, working out theories of her own and eventually, when, the police having failed, taking her theories to the chief of police.

It was but a very short time before the head of the great police force began to realize that he had made a find, that Madge, as she called herself, possessed one of those rare instincts seldom found in even a detective. He offered her a place on the force, which offer was declined.

However, the young woman did agree to take up certain cases for the chief, as they might present themselves. This she did. From the start her work was a brilliant success. She never received nor asked credit for what she had accomplished, but the satisfaction and the remuneration received from the work appeared to wholly satisfy her.

Madge excelled in another way. Her muscles due to long and skilful training were of iron. Under the graceful lines of figure, was a lithe, supple body, and the slender, artistic hands when clenched, could deliver a blow that had put more than one ruffian to sleep.

The society detective was a strange and unusual combination. Yet withal, she was a refined and lovable creature, one whom many admired, but whom none could possess for his own.

As Madge Nelson, none would have recognized her as Alice VanCamp, the favorite young society woman. This was due to her marvelous skill at make up. Then, again, the voice, the factor that indentifies almost every one, was so changed in Madge as to be wholly unrecognizable.

Madge soon found that she was able to find cases enough to make a splendid living for her. She had carried through successfully one case alone that had paid her thousands of dollars. This enabled her to pay off the mortgage on the family home with a good balance to spare.

Not one of the young society woman's friends suspected that she was leading what they would have called a double life. This very fact enabled her to get closer to many mysteries than would otherwise have been the case. When Madge the Detective got a society case to investigate, Alice VanCamp usually worked it up as a favored guest. Hers was a clever and brilliant mind.

Madge in the brief time she had spent in looking into the robbery at the Sangster mansion had formed certain well defined ideas. She knew full well that Corinne was wholly guiltless. She knew too—as the police officers did not—that the thief had gained an entrance to the house through the rear hall window, which he had reached over the addition at the rear of the house.

Madge had discovered something else, too. She had a copy of the footprint which it was reasonable to suppose the thief had left on the ground at the rear, and beyond this was another and most important clue. A slender bit of dark cloth of peculiar though almost invisibly pattern now rested in the detective's pocket.

The young woman had found it clinging to the lower corner of the safe door, where it had been torn from the costume of the thief, without doubt, as no one in the Sangster household wore goods of that pattern.

With these faint clues in her possession, Miss VanCamp hastened home in her own carriage. In her library she spread her clues out before her on the library table and examined the cloth under a magnifying glass.

"Of fine quality. Evidently worn by a person who is used to good clothes. I should say that that dress was worn by a person of about eighteen years of age."

Madge mused with half closed eyelids for a long time.

"Yes, I am sure of my ground now. The next thing is to find the thief. I see I shall have something to do on my own account, for this is no ordinary crime. Then there is another feature. Where did the thief obtain his exact information about the house and the jewels? That is an even more serious thing than all the rest. Some one in the household gave the information away, but doing so may have been purely accidental. I am inclined to the belief that it was."

Still thinking about the case, Miss VanCamp called Sarah, her faithful servitor, and told the woman she would retire. Sarah was an old servant and was wholly in the confidence of her mistress. Alice had found the old woman very useful in many of the cases on which the detective was engaged.

While preparing for bed the young woman related all that she knew about the case in hand.

"I am going to have you take a position in that house for a few days, Sarah," announced Madge.

On the following morning, Sarah presented herself at the Sangster mansion with a letter from Alice VanCamp which readily gained her a place. Perhaps the broker sensed something of the reason for this move, for he was a very shrewd man, but if he did so, he kept his own counsel well, and Sarah settled down to the routine of the household, which, however, was quiet after the wedding.

Nothing of the robbery got into the papers, owing, perhaps, to the fact that the broker had seen the authorities and properly induced them to keep silence. The maid was still locked up and there seemed no immediate probability of obtaining her release.

On the following morning Madge was up early. An hour or so later as Madge the Society Detective she left the house by the servants' entrance and proceeded up town. From then until evening nothing was seen of the beautiful young detective in her usual haunts.

Night came on. Madge made her way down Broadway, scanning the people she met with more than ordinary keenness. She was giving as much heed to the clothes the passersby wore as to their features.

At last she turned off to pass through a side street to Sixth avenue.

When half way across she halted suddenly. Coming toward her was a girl running. She could hear the young woman's heavy breathing many yards before the girl reached her.

"Hold on, my dear, where so fast?" demanded Madge, barring the progress of the other.

The girl dodged and would have fled on, but Madge laid a firm hand on the younger woman's shoulder.

"Wait, my dear. You are in trouble. Tell me what it is."

"Let me go, I tell you, let me go!" cried the girl struggling with all her might.

CHAPTER XI.

A GOOD SAMARITAN.

"Be still, child. I would befriend you. Come, if you fear to remain here. We will go to some place and you will tell me your trouble. I am your friend."

The girl glanced up apprehensively into the face of the detective. What she saw there seemed to reassure her in a measure. But almost instantly a hard expression appeared in her face and eyes.

"I have nothing to do with you. I will go my way."

"No, you will not."

"Why will I not?"

"Because I want to talk to you."

"You want to talk to me?"

"Yes."

"What do you wish to say to me?"

"To find out how I can help you."

"You cannot help me—no one can help me. I will be going."

"No, I have something to say to you," insisted Madge. "Come with me where we can talk and you shall tell me your troubles. I will help you."

"You cannot help me. No one can help me now."

"Not so bad as that. See, you are excited. I soon will make you feel better and then we will talk."

Madge released her grip on the arm of the girl and linking her own arm within that of the younger woman started on. The girl sought to draw away, but the pressure of the detective's arm grew firmer and more insistent.

"Who are you?" demanded the girl, glancing up suspiciously, half fearfully at Madge.

"Like yourself, I, too, need sympathy and help. We shall help each other."

The detective led the way on, then turning, proceeded down town.

"Where is your home, child?"

"I have no home—that—that is, not now."

"Ah. Are you hungry?"

"No, no."

"I thought if you were that we would go to some quiet place and have a bite to eat."

The girl seemed to shrink at the idea of it. Madge instantly scented the reason. The girl was fearful of being discovered.

"Tell me, child are you fleeing from the police or from some danger that besets you?" urged the detective.

"It is worse than the police. I almost wish it were the police!"

"Why?"

"Because then my troubles would be ended."

"Ah! here we are!"

Madge had paused before a two-storied brick house of very ordinary appearance. The blinds were tightly drawn and the place might have been deserted for all appearance that the outside gave.

"We will go in here. You will be safe here and comfortable——"

"Where are you taking me?" demanded the girl, sharply.

"I am taking you to one of my homes. This is where I frequently stay. I promise you that you shall find happiness and safety here."

The girl wrenched herself loose almost savagely.

"I know! I know why you have taken me up like this. I am not that kind of a girl. Let me go, I tell you!"

"Child, child, are you mad?" exclaimed Madge. "Look at me. Do you think I am one to lead a young girl into any place where she ought not to go. Come. I am strangely drawn to you. I want to help you. I am going to help you, in spite of yourself. There is no person in that house save one—a good motherly old soul who will take you to her heart of hearts and make you happy. If the place does not please you then you may go at your will. I promise you that."

Somewhat molified, the young woman surveyed the house once more, then turning, said:

"I will go."

"You trust me?"

"I am not sure. I think so."

"You will after a little. I can be an all powerful friend to you, and I give you my word that I shall be."

Madge led her charge up the steps and pulling the bell waited. A middle aged, kindly-faced woman opened the door.

"Good evening, Mrs. Gates."

"Oh, Miss Madge, is that you?"

"Yes. I have a friend with me."

"I am glad to see you for——"

Madge gave Mrs. Gates a warning signal, whereat the woman quickly bridled her tongue. Then the detective led the way to the parlor.

"We wish to be alone for a little while, Mrs. Gates. If I wish you I will call."

"All right, dearie."

The woman of the house disappeared down the stairs to the basement.

"Now, my dear, to reassure you, let me say that Mrs. Gates is a fine woman. She keeps this house for me to use when I need. No one ever comes here save myself and no one save Mrs. Gates knows that I do come here."

"You do not live here?"

"Some of the time. I am a very busy woman and occasionally I am away for days at a time."

"It looks to be all right."

"It is all right. If you are in trouble perhaps it would be best for you to remain right here. You would do well to do so until you have recovered from your fright at least."

"From my fright?" demanded the girl sharply.

"Yes."

"How do you know I am frightened?"

"It is quite plain that you are. It must have been something very much out of the ordinary to have upset you so, too."

The girl did not answer. For several minutes Madge sat studying the face of the girl before her.

It was a face of great beauty, native refinement and intelligence, but here and there harsh lines told the story of bitter hours.

"Where have I seen that face before?" thought the detective. "I know it and yet I don't know it."

Try as she might, Alice VanCamp could not call back where she had seen the face of the girl before. Just at the moment when memory seemed about to reveal the secret it would be whisked away from her as if on wings.

"It will come to me. I shall catch the recollection sooner or later," thought Madge.

"Now, dear, tell me your troubles."

"I cannot."

"You must." There was an insistence in the tone that there was no denying. At last the girl looked up, studied the face of her new-found friend, after which her glances dropped to the carpet and a dull flush suffused her cheeks.

CHAPTER XII.

HER STRANGE STORY.

"Why should I tell you my story?"

"Because I am your friend," replied Madge.

"You may not be. You may be trying to entrap me, to get me into deeper trouble. God knows, I have enough as it is."

"You know that is not true."

"Forgive me, I did not mean it."

"What is your name, child?"

"Agnes."

"Agnes what?"

"Warwick."

"Why were you running away when I met you to-night?"

"I won't tell you."

"Oh, yes you will, you know you must tell me."

"I won't," emphasized the girl.

"Then I will tell you. You were running to the river where you thought to end your sorrows."

Agnes glanced up with a frightened expression on her face.

"How do you know that?" she demanded sharply.

"Never mind how I know. That I do know, is sufficient. Why were you doing that?"

"For reasons."

"What reasons?"

"I was unhappy."

"Come, come, dear, don't try to evade me. I must have your story, then we shall plan something for you to help you. Tell me all, dear."

Alice VanCamp rose and stepping over beside the girl, stroked the latter's head gently. All at once, Agnes burst into a flood of tears. With bowed head, she wept out her bitter sorrow, Madge the Detective making no effort to restrain the younger woman's grief.

At last Agnes raised her head.

"Why did you make me cry?" she asked weakly.

"I did not, child. But it is better for you that you should. I am sure you feel relieved now. Tell me where you live?"

Agnes gave the address of a house not far from where they were at that moment.

"With whom do you live?"

"With my father."

"Is your father unkind to you?"

"Yes."

"He beats you?"

"Sometimes," was the half-articulated reply.

"What for?"

"To make me do his bidding."

"Have you a mother?"

"I don't remember that I ever had one. Sometimes I have a faint recollection of a sweet, motherly face that I have thought might be that of my mother."

"Does your father never speak of her?"

"No, he never does. He forbids me to ask questions about her. But I am sure if I ever had a mother that she must have been good and sweet and noble. Perhaps I would have been, too, under other circumstances."

"Tell me about your father, why does he beat you?"

"I have told you. To make me do things he wants me to."

"What things?"

"Steal!"

It was out at last. Madge had suspected the truth long before, but she preferred to have Agnes tell her in her own way.

"He makes you steal?"

"Yes, I am a thief."

"But I am sure it is not because you want to be, my child?"

"No, I loathe it. I had determined to kill myself. I told my father to-night that I should steal no more. I begged him to let me go away, where I might earn an honest living. He beat me with a razor strop. See, see!"

The girl bared her left arm where livid streaks testified to the welts of the strop as it had been laid over and about her.

The eyes of the Society Detective glowed with a strange light. Yet there was no other sign to indicate that her emotions had been aroused. The white hands lay passive in her lap, her position one of ease and perfect grace.

"How long have you been doing this?" asked Madge in a quiet voice.

"Since I finished school. I was educated fairly well, but before I had finished at the boarding school I was attending, father took me away. I was taught to steal. I was beaten and flogged. It is a wonder that I did not kill him." A fierce light sprang into the eyes of the girl. "Perhaps I should have to-night, had I not made up my mind to end it all by making away with myself."

"Why have you not appealed to the police or to some one for relief?" questioned the detective.

"I should have been arrested and sent to prison."

"Are you a skilful thief?"

"I think so. I have never been detected. I can do almost anything in stealing—but why am I telling this to you? You will betray me?"

"No, my child I will not betray you."

"You will not?"

"No, I will save you."

"You cannot do that."

"You do not know either my power or my resources."

"But I am a thief," protested the girl.

"By force of circumstances only. You are not a thief at heart."

"No, I loathe it, I abhor it. I shall surely kill myself if I ever have to steal again."

"You shall not."

"But he will kill me, if I do not."

"You shall never go back to him, child. He is an inhuman father, if he is a father at all, which latter fact I very much doubt."

"But he will find me?"

"I shall see that he does not. I will see your father myself."

Agnes' face went pale.

"No, no, you must not. He would surely kill you, too, then all would be lost. No, I must think it all out for myself."

"See here, Agnes, you will leave all of that to me. I will think the matter out and when I have decided upon the right course, I shall follow it and this inhuman father of yours will have done with his control over you. It may be necessary for you to remain here quietly for a time, after which you may face the world again and without fear or favor."

"It is impossible."

"Child you do not know who I am?"

"No, I do not."

"Have you ever heard of Madge, the Society Detective, so called?"

"Yes."

"How have you heard of her?"

"She once sent a friend of father's to prison."

"Who was that?"

"Dick Sparling."

Madge's eyes sparkled. Well did she remember the case.

"Then you will appreciate what I am about to tell you."

"What is it you wish to tell me?"

"My dear, I am Madge, the Society Detective."

The face of the beautiful thief went ghastly pale.

"You—you are—are Madge?"

"Yes."

"Then, God help me, I am lost!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BEAUTY IN DISTRESS.

"Child, child, be calm."

Agnes had risen. There was a wild, menacing look in her eyes. She appeared to be upon the point of doing something desperate.

"Sit down; did I not tell you I am your friend?"

"No, no, you are a detective! You have trapped me! You will betray me! Oh, why did I trust myself to you?"

The girl swayed unsteadily.

"Sit down!"

Miss VanCamp's tone was commanding.

"I have told you that you have nothing to fear from me. I am your friend. I will prove to you that I am your friend, and you will thank God for the moment that gave you to me. Now, be calm, child, and listen to reason."

"And you will not arrest me?"

"Arrest you? No, certainly not."

"Not if I told you, confessed my crimes?"

"No. But you need not confess them to me. It is not for me to know. What you have done has not been of your own free will, therefore, it is not you who have done these things, it is the monster whom you call father and whom I do not believe is your father any more than am I. No father could act like that toward his own flesh and blood. Agnes, I want to ask another and more personal question of you."

Miss Warwick nodded faintly.

"Are you a good girl?"

A faint color surged to the cheeks of Agnes, mounting to her forehead. Her eyes grew luminous.

"Yes, I am."

"I believe you. Nothing else matters. Now I shall work for you. You will see what I can do and how well I can do it. What other reason had you for leaving home so suddenly?"

The question was hurled at the girl with such unexpectedness that she colored, this time violently, to the roots of her hair.

"What other reason?"

"Yes."

"How do you know there was another reason?"

"I know, that is sufficient. There was a man in the case?"

"Yes."

"His name?"

"Rex Chapin."

"Tell me about him?"

"He made father's acquaintance, I know not how. They became great friends, though I knew father despised him and that he was tolerating the fellow only for what he could get out of him. Well, Rex was a handsome fellow; that is, he would have been, ordinarily. At first, I felt rather sorry for him, knowing that sooner or later father would finish him. For that reason, perhaps, I showed more consideration for the man than I otherwise should have done."

"Yes, go on."

"I soon saw that he had taken a violent liking for me. Then I avoided him. But he pursued me continually. One day he made me very angry by something he said to me. After that I avoided him."

Madge nodded understandingly.

"A robbery was planned. It seemed he gave the information to father on which father acted, or on which I acted, for I was the one who, as usual, had to do the real work."

"How long ago was this?" interrupted the detective eagerly.

"A long time ago."

"Oh! Proceed."

"I did the work and did it successfully. I got away with more stuff than I ever had before that. It was a dandy haul," added the girl with sparkling eyes. But the expression soon faded from them and her face grew pale.

"Yes?"

"Well, afterwards, that is, some time afterwards, father told me what the bargain was. In payment for the information that made the haul possible, he was to give this fellow Rex a number of thousand dollars and throw me in to boot."

"Marry you to the wretch?" demanded Miss VanCamp.

"No, worse."

"The hound!" breathed the beautiful detective. "You rebelled?"

"With all the strength that was in me."

"Was the young man present at the time?"

"He was."

"What did you do?"

"I forgot myself in my terrible anger. I struck him with a chair. I knocked him down. He lay upon the floor like one dead. His face was bleeding. With a terrible oath, father started for me. Then I fled."

"You poor, poor, child," murmured Alice in her soft, sympathetic voice, as she took the slender figure of Agnes in her arms and pressed her lips to the hot feverish cheeks of the younger woman. "How you have suffered. That there should be such monsters allowed to live, almost passes human comprehension."

Agnes impulsively threw her arms about the neck of her new-found friend. Such tender sympathy the girl never had known before, within her memory. It opened the flood gates of sympathy and awakened the tender emotions that had so long remained dormant in her heart. Together the two women sat in silence for a long time.

"Agnes, you have no affection in your heart for this human monster, have you?"

"My father?"

"Yes?"

"I loathe him. I could see him torn limb from limb without stirring any other emotion than joy in me."

"That settles it," nodded Madge, with emphasis.

"Settles what?"

"He is not your father. No daughter could feel that way toward a parent, no matter how bad the parent might be. Blood is thicker than water, as the old saying goes. It is a true saying. There never was a truer one."

"You think he is not?" asked the girl with pleading eyes.

"I am positive."

"Oh, I hope he is not."

"And my love, it shall be my happy task to find your real father if he be alive and restore you to his arms. I promise you that, if he lives, I shall find him. Madge Nelson makes no idle boasts. What she promises she does."

An impulsive kiss was the reward of the detective's declaration.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

"Now, my dear, I want you to go to your room. You may retire or not as you wish, but make yourself perfectly at home. No harm can come to you here, so long as you do not show yourself at the windows or venture upon the street."

"Are you going to leave me?"

"Yes."

"Please don't," pleaded the girl.

"I must. I have much to do. You should know that."

"Then let me go with you."

"No, that would not be possible. Where I go would be no place for you. Have no fears. Rest content. You are in good hands, and if you wish anything, you will feel perfectly free to ask the housekeeper for it. I shall give her orders before I leave, though that is not at all necessary. This is your home fully as much as it is mine. Use it in that light and you will please me."

"When shall I see you again?"

"I cannot say. It may be to-night, in the morning or possibly days. I can be no more definite. It will be hard for you to remain in doors all the time during my absence, but I must have your promise that you will do this. Will you make that promise?"

"Yes, I shall do exactly as you want me to."

"That is a dear. Now I shall go away perfectly contented in mind. Come, I will show you to your room."

Agnes found her room a cheerful, cosy little place at the rear of the house looking out onto a well-kept back yard of the conventional city type. At the back was a warehouse with closed iron blinds, so that the girl could sit there and see the fresh sunshine without danger of being observed. Madge warned her, however, against showing herself at the street windows in the front of the house. Agnes promised to be good.

After attending to all the girl's little requirements, Madge kissed the girl good night and left the house, first having called the housekeeper to give the latter full instructions.

An hour later, Spindle Warwick, as he was known among his associates, was startled by a ring at his door. He occupied rooms on the second floor back of a building used for stores on the lower floor and offices in most of the rest of the building.

Spindle glanced at the clock. The hour was very late for visitors.

"Who the devil——" muttered the man. Then taking a revolver from the drawer of the table before him, slipping the weapon in his pocket he strode to the door, throwing it wide open, as if he had nothing to fear.

"There, before him, stood a very pretty young woman, slender, fair of face, dark-haired and keen-eyed.

"Is this Mr. Warwick?" she asked sweetly.

"Yes, what do you want?"

Miss VanCamp, for it was herself, gave the man a quick, comprehensive glance. He looked to her more like a college professor at first glance, but in the next second she saw deeper. The man though he wore spectacles, had the shifty eyes of the professional crook. The eyes took on an Oriental slant and set unusually close together.

"A dangerous man," was the mental summing up of the young woman.

"I should like to see you alone a moment."

The man regarded her keenly for a brief moment.

"Come in," he said, closing and locking the door behind her.

"Thank you!" answered Miss VanCamp, sweetly.

"Sit down," demanded Warwick, almost roughly.

Madge did so.

"Now what do you want?"

"I should like to see Agnes."

"Agnes?"

The word came out with explosive force.

"Yes, sir."

"And who might Agnes be?" he demanded, sarcastically.

"Your daughter, so she says, though I must confess that I fail to observe any marked family likeness between you."

Warwick's eyes narrowed.

"What do you know about my daughter?" he demanded in a quiet tone, that, to the keenly attuned ears of the caller, conveyed a subtle warning.

"She is my friend."

"And who are you?"

"I am known among our class as—but it does not matter who I am known as. We are friends."

"When did you meet my daughter?"

"Some weeks ago at the Charity Bazar at the Waldorf."

"What were you doing there?"

"Much the same that Agnes was," laughed the young woman. "We found congenial companionship in each other's company from the first. I asked her if she would be at liberty to help me sometime when I had anything worth while on."

"She said no, she wouldn't."

"Well?"

"I have something on hand. I thought perhaps I might be able to induce her to give me a hand. I need some one who can work delicately."

"You are very frank, madame, I must say. How do you know but I may decide to turn you over to the police?"

Madge laughed.

"I am not at all fearful."

"You are not?"

"Certainly not."

"May I ask why?"

"You may."

"Well?"

"Thieves seldom give one another away."

An angry light flashed into the eyes of Warwick.

"Be careful, young woman. I am not in the habit of being talked to in this manner."

"I have said nothing that is not the truth. Why not call a spade a spade in the presence of spades? We are both spades, aces or deuces as the case may be, at that."

Warwick laughed this time. He was becoming interested.

"You say you have a game on hand?"

"I think I intimated something of the sort."

"Is there much in it?"

"Something like a fortune," answered the girl carelessly.

The crook started, then there flashed into his narrow eyes a crafty look.

"A fortune, eh?"

CHAPTER XV.

NOT SO DELICATE, AFTER ALL.

A crafty light had sprung into the eyes of Spindle Warwick. He eyed the girl narrowly for several minutes.

"What is the nature of this game you wanted my daughter to participate in?"

"Oh, you are really interested in it, are you?" laughed the girl, tantalizingly.

"A father has to be careful where his daughter is concerned," replied the hypocrite, piously.

A ripple of laughter greeted the words, bringing a flush to the cheek of the bespectacled, serious-looking, gaunt face. Warwick came near losing his suavity of manner.

"Are you making sport of me, young woman?"

"Making sport of you? Why, my dear fellow, I do not see anything humorous in you. You are the most serious-looking person it has ever been my pleasure to gaze upon. But, you wanted to know what the nature of the game is on which I have come here to enlist the services of your daughter?"

"It will be best for me to know. You surely cannot speak of it to my daughter until I know all the details of it."

Madge knew better about this than did Warwick. She alone, was in a position to speak to Agnes at the present time.

"By the way, what has become of Agnes's young man?" asked the woman, casually.

"What?"

"Agnes's young man?"

"I do not know what you mean. To whom do you refer?"

"I don't know his name. Let me see Reginald, Reg—no that was not it. She told me the young man was very sweet on her, but that she hated him. Curious I have forgotten the name. From what she said it struck me that he might be available for a certain thing I want done."

"Young woman, what have you come here for?" demanded Warwick steadily.

"I thought I had made myself plain. I have told you exactly what I came here for."

"You have told me nothing. I demand to know all the facts in the case you have referred to."

"The young man?"

"To the devil with the young man. The game you spoke of some time ago before you began beating around the bush."

"You wish me to tell you all about it, eh?"

"I not only wish, but I insist."

"And supposing I refuse?"

"Then I shall find a way to make you speak out."

"Supposing you begin now," suggested the caller, calmly, leaning both elbows on the table and looking the man squarely in the eyes. "You are a man and I a weak woman. Try to make me say something I don't want to and note the results."

Madge leaned back after a moment and laughed.

"You have got a yellow streak in you haven't you?" she scoffed. "I thought as much. That makes it all the more certain that Agnes is not of

your blood. I didn't believe her, when she told me she was your daughter. Now I am sure of it."

"You hussey!" hissed the man.

"You shouldn't indulge in such expressions in the presence of ladies," warned Madge. "It doesn't become you, though it fits your character most excellently. Further than this I am not in the habit of being addressed in such terms. You will have to speak in a more gentlemanly way if you wish me to remain."

"You don't have to remain."

"Don't I?"

"No."

"Thank you."

"I didn't ask you to come here. I don't want you here. I'd be much better pleased if you got out."

"I think I will stay then," decided the girl, settling down in her chair in apparent perfect contentment.

"What do you want here?" demanded the man.

"I think you asked me that question before. I told you that for one thing, I was here to see Agnes."

"You can't see her."

"I can't?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"That is my business."

"You are very discourteous. I ask you again why I am not to see your daughter?"

"Because she isn't here, curse you!" exploded Warwick.

"Thank you," replied Madge, demurely.

"Now, I hope you are satisfied and that——"

"Satisfied—no."

"Well, what is it now?"

"Where is Agnes?"

"That is none of your affair."

"For argument's sake, we will say that it is my affair. Where is she?"

"She is not here."

"So I think you have already said. I am very anxious to see her."

Warwick regarded the detective shrewdly.

"You say you came here to interest her in the work?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"Will you tell me what you want her to do?"

"Why should I?"

"Because, perhaps I may be able to give you some help."

"I don't want you to. I want a woman or a young man. The latter will do. What I want is a dissipated young blade who can be molded to suit my requirements. If you can furnish me with what I want, I can put a lot of money in your pocket or his or both, whichever way you may wish to work it out."

The eyes of the crook glowed.

"How much?"

"Well, if I were able to get hold of Agnes and have her help me it would be worth a great deal more to you as well as to me. Do you not think you could find her?"

"Find her? Did I say she was lost?" demanded Spindle with narrowing eyes.

"I do not remember that you did. You impressed me as not knowing, however."

"Come, you are here for business. Let us settle down and talk business," suggested the man.

"Very well, we will talk business," answered Madge the Detective.

CHAPTER XVI.

HER WITS AGAINST HIS.

"First, tell me what the lay is?"

"It is, or will be, a second story job, as the case looks now."

"Where?"

"Oh, in a house I know about."

"What shape is the fat in?"

"Principally diamonds."

"Paste, probably," sniffed Warwick, contemptously.

"These will not be."

"You seem to know a great deal about it?"

"I do."

"What makes you so sure they will be the real dewdrops."

"Because they are going to be a present to a bride."

"Ah!"

"There is going to be a bushel of them, more or less."

"Then, this bride is a swell?"

"Yes."

"Who is she?"

"I haven't said."

"You will have to."

"Who will make me?"

"I will."

Madge laughed lightly.

"Better men than you have tried it," she said, without a suggestion of boasting in her tone. "And they have failed. You will fail. You are treading on dangerous ground, Spindle Warwick."

The crook started at the words.

"You know my title?" he demanded, suspiciously.

"I ought to."

"Why?"

"I have had you held up as a model ever since I got into the game, and that wasn't yesterday!" she added.

The suspicion of a smile appeared on Warwick's face.

"Is this game you speak of a safe one?"

"No, no games are safe."

"That's right," agreed the crook.

"This one is as safe as any one I know of, because the people will be otherwise engaged."

"It is to be at a wedding, eh?"

"Yes. You have worked that kind of a game before and you know how easily it can be done."

He shot a shrewd glance at her, but Madge's face possessed no guile. She seemed absorbed in her subject to the exclusion of all else.

"Never mind what I have done. It is what may be done in the future that we are interested in at the present moment. Will the jewels be guarded by the police or by specials?"

"I don't know. I have not been able to learn. I shall find out all of that in good time."

"Good. I hope you don't overrate your ability to do things."

"I never have. There always comes a time in our business when we take a bite more than we can digest."

Warwick laughed.

"You are a keen one."

"Thank you. All compliments gratefully received."

"When does the wedding come off?"

"Tuesday, week."

"When do you propose to make the sortie?"

"I didn't say I proposed to do it."

"Well, when is the sortie to be made, if that suits you better?"

"It does. The sortie will be made on the night of the wedding, of course."

"Can it not be made before?"

"Yes, that would be possible, but were we to do so, we should not be making as good a haul. All the presents will not be in. For instance, the groom's present to his bride will be a rope of diamonds worth a king's ransom in themselves."

Warwick's eyes twinkled avariciously, his hands clasped and unclasped and Miss VanCamp noted that they were white and slender. The man though a brute, was artistic, clever and dangerous. She knew that full well. She knew that he would not hesitate to shoot her where she sat, did he have reason to believe she was not what she seemed.

But Madge the Detective had no fear. She had passed through too many perilous situations to feel fear. The girl was amply able to take care of herself under almost any circumstances, no matter how critical.

"What is the worth of the whole swag?"

"What share would you demand, were Agnes to do the job for me?" replied Madge without answering the question.

Warwick wrinkled his forehead and thought for some moments.

"You have got to have somebody to help you?"

"I didn't say so."

"Not necessary. It is the fact, or you would not have come here for assistance."

"Well, for the sake of argument, we will say that I do need help. Naturally, I am not calling here at this time of the night for the mere pleasure of gazing upon your manly countenance."

Warwick frowned.

"Cut it out!" he growled.

Madge laughed softly and aggravatingly.

"You have not answered my question yet?"

"Who disposes of the gems?"

"That remains to be settled between us if we make a deal. We can each take our share and dispose of them. Perhaps that would be best."

He nodded his approval of this plan. It seemed to strike him with much favor.

"I will agree to that."

"What per cent?" she urged.

"Eighty."

"Eighty for me, and you will be satisfied with twenty per cent?" questioned the girl demurely.

"No, not by a jug full!" shouted Warwick.

"Indeed? You surprise me. What do you mean?"

"It's the other way around. You get twenty per cent and we get eighty."

"Mister man, you've got another guess coming," replied the girl rising and buttoning the glove on her left hand. "You and I can't talk business, I see."

CHAPTER XVII.

SHADOWED!

"Hold on there!"

"Well?"

"Don't be so touchy."

"I am not touchy."

"Yes you are."

"No."

"Then why are you leaving in a huff?"

"Why should I remain longer? We have nothing further to discuss. You want the whole of the swag, even though I am making it possible for you to make a fortune that you would not even have had a look-in at had it not been for me."

"But you want us to do all the work," protested Warwick.

"Hardly. I think I have already done some of it, and much more will be done before I am ready to call you and your daughter into the case. When the bubble is ready to burst, then I shall call upon you to do your part."

"How much of a haul is it likely to be?" again asked the crook.

"It may total up to a big figure."

Madge was urging the crook on, and he was jumping at the bait now.

"How big?"

"Oh, perhaps half a million dollars."

Spindle Warwick fairly leaped out of his chair.

"Half a million dollars?" he gasped.

Madge smiled tolerantly.

"You seem interested?" she laughed.

"Heavens, it's a fortune!"

"Of course, it is. Didn't I tell you it was? Now, will you let me have Agnes to help carry the thing through?"

"I can't just now."

"Why not?"

"I tell you she is not here, and I don't know where the little hussey is."

"Tut, tut. She does not deserve to be called such names. Agnes is a fine girl and I shall not listen to such language directed at her. You do not know where she is?"

"No."

"How does that happen?"

"No matter how it happens. She isn't here and that's all there is about it."

"But you will find her?" questioned the woman.

"Oh, I'll get her all right, no doubt about that. I'll have her in hand pretty soon and I'll teach her a lesson she won't soon forget."

The lips of the detective compressed and a dangerous light flashed into her eyes.

"When do you think I shall be able to come here to see her?"

"I'll let you know. What address?"

The girl laughed.

"I am not giving away my address. I will come back in a day or so and see what you have to offer. But we have not yet decided on the terms. You, of course, did not mean to hog eighty per cent of the swag? You know well enough that I wouldn't fall for that."

"I'll make a great concession," said the crook, as Madge smiled tolerantly. "I'll say share and share alike. How does that strike you?"

"It doesn't strike me at all."

"That is the best I will do. I wouldn't think of touching the case for any less."

"And if you don't get Agnes, what then?"

"I'll pull off the thing myself."

"Very well, I accept your terms. I can get plenty of people to help me, but I don't want them. I want

somebody that I can depend upon, somebody on whom I have a hold."

"On whom you have a hold?" exclaimed Warwick, explosively.

"Yes."

"What do you mean, woman?"

The girl laughed easily.

"Oh, that's all right."

"It isn't all right. I want to know what you mean?"

"If you insist I will tell you."

"Do so."

"Well then, here it is. I know all about that last haul of yours, how much you got and all about it. That was a fine second-story game. I was in for that job myself, but you got the best of me there."

The detective laughed harshly.

"I said to myself, a fellow who can pull off a game as neatly as that is the man for my purposes, and so I came to you. You needn't tell Agnes that I know anything about it, though. It isn't necessary for her to know."

"You devil!" cried Warwick, his face suddenly flushing with anger.

For a brief instant he appeared to be struggling with himself.

All at once he sprang toward the girl.

"Stand back!" warned Madge.

"I'll take it out of you, you hussey! I'll show you you can't trifle with me!"

The next second Warwick gripped the left arm of the young woman with a grip that would have made any other woman cry out with pain.

"Mister man, will you let go of my arm?" she demanded, coolly.

"No, by Heaven, I'll hang onto you this time! I'll make you eat those words, and I'll——"

The man was working himself into a towering rage.

"I don't permit men to take such liberties with me. Will you release me?"

"No!"

Biff!

The blow landed fair and square on the point of Spindle's jaw. He dropped like a beef under the slaughterer's ax. The falling body carried a chair down with it, upsetting the table at the same time.

"There, I guess that will teach the brute a lesson. It's one for Agnes at the same time."

With that Madge unlocked the door, stepped out and made her way down stairs. For a moment or so she stood thoughtfully at the door on the street, then she started away. The girl had not gone far before a dark figure slunk out of the doorway she had just left, skulking along in the shadows behind her. Had the detective not been so absorbed in her thoughts she would quickly have discovered the shadow, but as it was, Madge went along all unconscious of the peril that lurked on her trail.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MEETING THEIR MATCH.

But Madge Nelson was a shrewd girl. It was a clever shadow, indeed, who could long remain on her trail without discovery.

All at once some inborn instinct seemed to warn the girl that danger threatened. She raised her head as if scenting the air, but Madge did not make the mistake of turning around. She continued on steadily as if nothing had occurred to excite her suspicions.

"I am being followed," she murmured. "Warwick must have woke up sooner than I thought. This is strange, there are two of them. Very well, let them follow. Perhaps I shall be able to show them a trick they never saw worked before. I wonder what the game is?"

Madge made several short turns, then, changing her mind turned and took the back track again.

This soon brought her face to face with two men. She did not appear to see them, as she went hurrying on. Suddenly she bumped fairly into one of the shadows.

"I beg your pardon, sir," murmured Madge. "I did not see you."

"Hold on, miss, not so fast!" commanded one.

"Permit me to pass, please," begged the girl, with dignity.

"Not much. I'm wise to your game."

"What do you mean?"

"You know well enough what I mean."

"Better let her go, Berg."

"Let her go? I guess not. She's got my watch!" cried the shadow.

"So, that's her game, is it?"

"You bet it is. I was wise to her the minute she bumped into us."

The fellow had fixed a firm grip on the arm of the woman detective. Madge was making no effort to release herself.

"What are you going to do with her?"

"I reckon we had better take her in."

"Yes, I guess that would be a good thing to do. Shall we call a cop?"

"No, we'll take her in ourselves."

"You had better not," warned the girl.

"It ain't for you to dictate, girl. We'll do as we think best."

At that, one ranged himself on each side of her and began leading Madge along.

"You come along quiet like, girl, and you won't have any trouble with us, but make any row and there will be more trouble than you ever had in your life."

"Why are you doing this to me?"

"Because you are a thief. You are a fine bird, you are, even if you are a woman. I reckon the chief will be glad to get his hands on you."

"And you are a precious pair of rogues yourselves. No honest man would use a woman in this manner."

"Shut up!" commanded one of the men. "You will force us to call the police."

Madge appeared to tremble under this threat. From that moment on she went along, apparently, willingly enough. But her strange willingness did not appear to arouse the suspicions of the men. They were congratulating themselves on the ease with which they had obtained possession of the young woman. Hurrying her along, they turned into a side street, then made their way across town toward the East river until Second avenue had been reached. There they turned uptown.

"Isn't this an unusual way to take for a police station?" questioned the girl.

"Never mind, you'll find out when we get there," answered one of her captors.

"Yes, I'll find out," replied Madge, significantly. "You will find out, too, if you aren't playing on the square with me. You don't suppose I'm going to let you lead me to a police station, do you?"

"Where do you think we are taking you, then?"

"That remains to be seen. I shall know when I get there, perhaps. However, I may not reach there at all."

"You may not?"

"No."

"What makes you think you won't?"

"I may manage to make my escape before that."

"No danger of that," laughed the scoundrels.

"No, I guess not. You've got me this time, but my turn will come later. I'll see that you fly cops, or whatever you are, get yours after I get free, and if I don't I have friends who will look after you for me."

"That's all right, girlie. Your friends won't get a chance to find out where you are right away, I am thinking."

"Perhaps they are not as slow as you think. They will know soon enough, and then look out. Things will begin to happen."

The men laughed easily. What could a delicate woman hope to accomplish against the powerful band to which Spindle Warwick belonged? It was a band possessing more far-reaching power than even the police dreamed. Miss VanCamp, in the character of Madge the Society Detective, did have an inkling of the truth. In fact, she had correctly analyzed the situation. She saw that she had inadvertently stumbled upon a vast criminal machine, one whose ramifications and branches were too numerous to take account of.

"I will break them up. I know what I am about now," she thought as the men led her along. "And when I am ready to move—when I do move, there will be an exodus of thieves from this town. They will be taking their hurried departure for Chicago and other parts of the Union. I am on the right track. I know, now."

"What is that you were saying?" demanded one of the captors.

"Perhaps I was thinking out loud," laughed Madge. "It is a bad habit I have fallen into."

In the meantime the delicate fingers of the detective had been skillfully probing the pockets of the men who were leading her along. There were weapons in those pockets. These she did not disturb. She possessed weapons of her own. However, there were other things that the sensitive fingers found and deftly removed, without, in fact, so much as moving the muscles of the upper arms.

At last the party halted before a building that appeared to be a private house. One of the old-time mansions of Second avenue.

The men started up the steps with their prisoner.

"What is this?" demanded Madge, suspiciously.

"This is the station."

She peered up, caught the number of the house, which she fixed in her mind for future reference.

"You are mistaken," said the girl.

"No matter, in you go!"

While one hastily opened the door the other thrust Madge in, then followed. The instant the second man had entered, things began to happen.

Suddenly releasing herself from the fellow's grip, the girl dealt him a powerful blow that felled the man to the floor.

Biff!

Ere the other man was able to recover from his astonishment, he caught a sledge-hammer blow on the neck that sent him spinning across the floor, landing him in a motionless heap against the wall.

"There, I think I have taught you loafers a lesson that you will not soon forget," muttered Madge.

Her words fell on deaf ears, for the men were unconscious, wholly knocked out by the girl's powerful blows. Miss VanCamp very calmly stepped out, closing the door behind her, but in her hand lay the key that she had taken from the lock.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNEXPECTED SETBACK.

The girl quickly hurried from the scene, slipping around a corner and disappearing from view. When the villains finally awoke and hurried out, their intended victim was nowhere to be seen.

Very shortly after that, Spindle Warwick came down the street. He gave a signal rap on the door. It was opened by one of the two men.

"Well, did you get her?" he demanded.

"Yes, we got her."

"Good! Where is she?"

"That's what we should like to know," answered the man, ruefully.

"What? You don't mean to say that——"

The fellow nodded.

"The girl got away."

"Got away?"

"Yes."

"You fools! You have made a mess of it! But, I felt sure you would. I told you she was a sharp one—sharp as lightning, but you didn't believe me. It serves you right. I am only glad she didn't connect me up with the affair. Still, she may suspect at that. Tell me about it."

"Well, we got her on the street. Played right into our hands and bumped into us. We accused her of picking my pocket, then we took her along."

"Did she resist?"

"No, she led as fine as you please, she appeared to be thoroughly halter-broke."

A sarcastic smile curled the lips of Spindle Warwick.

"You are a couple of mutton-heads," he scoffed. "Didn't you know enough to realize what that meant?"

"I don't see that it meant anything in particular."

"Why, you idiots, she was on to your little game all the time. She was playing you for a couple of suckers. Well, you are easy. You deserve all you got and that is nothing. I promised you a good price if you would land her here without bringing me into the case. I had hoped to get some valuable information out of her. She's worth money, that woman is."

"We'll get her yet," protested one of the men.

"No, thank you. I'll do my own getting, at least, I shall not trust you to go against the young woman again."

"Who is she, boss?"

"Never mind who she is. That doesn't concern you. But you have not told me how she managed to give you the slip?"

"No." It was very ruefully said.

"Explain? Did she give you the slip on the way here after fooling you into believing that you had her scared?"

"No, that wasn't the way of it."

"Come, speak out. How did it happen?"

"It was this way. We had got here with the gal."

"You got here with her?"

"Yes. Bob opened the door and I pushed her right into the hallway here. Bob came in closing the door behind him, then something happened."

"What happened?"

"She slugged me."

Warwick laughed outright.

"Then she slugged Bob. We both went down. I'm ashamed to confess it, boss, but that woman has got a punch like a Missouri mule. Ain't never seen anything like it. You can see how my face is swelled up——"

"She used a billy, that's what she did," interrupted the other ruffian.

"Nothing of the sort. She used her fists, she did, and I never see a man who could use his mauleys any better. She'd make Mr. Johnson sick at his stomach with one friendly little love tap, you bet. No more of them slender white hands for mine. No, sir, never again."

"I thought you said you would get her?" sneered Warwick.

"I'd get somebody to do it."

"No, thank you. We do not want any more people mixed up in this deal. And besides, I don't want any harm done to the woman. She is worth too much money to me just at present. I can't afford to lose her for a spell yet. Later on perhaps we might forget that she was on earth. Just now she's worth more alive than in the river. So she got in here, did she?"

"Yes."

"Was there a light here?"

"No, it was dark here then."

Warwick nodded, then he went out on the stoop where he took a survey.

"The visit won't do her any good. I shouldn't like to think she had got the place spotted. Did she seem to be looking about her much when you came in?"

"Not at all. She had her head down. I thought it was so we couldn't get a good look at her face."

"She is a pretty slick young woman, Berg. You have learned that to your surprise and at your expense, for losing her has lost you quite a bit of money."

The other man nodded sadly.

"Yes, I suppose that's so. It's a rotten fluke we've made of it."

"It is," agreed Spindle. "It is the worst ever. I have another job that I want you men to get out on."

"All right, boss, we'll try to do better next time. Is there a woman in this case, too?"

"Yes."

The man looked solemn.

"I dunno about that."

"Who is it?" demanded the other fellow.

"My daughter, Agnes."

"The deuce, you say. What has she been doing?"

"Nothing that will interest you."

"But what is it you want us to do?"

"Find her. She has either run away or been picked up. I think she has run away. She got in a temper over some fancied wrong last night and left the house. I want her found and brought back. But mind you, there must be no unnecessary force used."

"Sure, of course. Shall we take her home if we get her there?"

"I'll tell you where to take her after you get her. That will be time enough. You haven't got her yet, and judging from the success you have had in this case, I don't think you will get her right away."

"Can you give us a steer?"

"No. Keep outside, especially at night. I don't think you'll find her around in the daylight much. But at night keep a sharp lookout. No doubt she'll be over on Broadway working the crowds there for she's got to live and I know she didn't have a cent when she went away."

"You don't think she's jumped into the river or anything, do you?" questioned one shrewdly.

Warwick's face darkened.

"Hardly," he answered dryly. "No reason for that and you ought to know better than ask the question. It's near morning, now. Nothing can be done tonight. Get to bed and sleep. Let me hear from you tomorrow sometime if you get any news."

With that Warwick took his departure abruptly. But the coming day was to be replete with surprises, and even the crook was to be gratified.

In the meantime, Miss VanCamp had gone to her own home for a few hours of well-earned rest.

CHAPTER XX.

MADGE MEETS WITH A SURPRISE.

That afternoon Miss VanCamp, in her coupé, dressed elegantly, made a call upon the Sangsters. The young woman was in her sweetest mood. There was no trace of the woman of the previous night, Madge the Detective, had so valiantly fought her own battles.

"Well, did you get in touch with your friend the detective?" asked Mr. Sangster.

"Oh, yes, I did that last night."

"And will he take up the case?"

"He not only will, but has."

"You lost no time?" smiled the broker.

"No."

"Of course, it is too early yet to expect any results.

I was about to ask if your friend had made any report?"

"He had made distinct progress, sir. I may say that he is going to clear up this mystery in a very short time if I am any judge, at least, basing my opinion on what he tells me."

"You surprise me, Alice. Tell me all."

"No, I shall have to ask you to bear with us a little longer. The information is not mine to give just yet. In due time, you no doubt will learn all. Have you heard from Margaret yet?"

"No, that is, nothing more than a telegram from Washington where they are stopping for a few days. She asked me to tell you that she had taken your advice."

Alice's face was instantly wreathed in smiles.

"I knew she would forget about her loss after she got away. How is Mrs. Sangster to-day?"

"Tired, but well. She is driving in the park this afternoon."

"Then I will be going. I have several other calls to make this afternoon, then, too, I have some business matters to attend to."

"You are a very busy woman."

"Oh, yes."

"But I have never been able to figure out just what you do to occupy your time so fully."

"Perhaps it is just as well that you don't know, my dear, sir. You might not approve of my various avocations."

"Oh, yes, I should. I believe in every one having some distinct and definite purpose in life. Work is the only thing worth while. If we don't keep our minds occupied with some healthful occupation, we get into trouble."

"That is true," answered Alice thoughtfully. "Remember me to Mrs. Sangster. I will leave a card, but you deliver the message to her."

Alice was on too friendly a footing with the Sangster family to call for formalities. Mr. Sangster escorted her to her carriage and shortly after that the young society woman drove away. That afternoon she devoted to calling on her friends, at the same time as she lounged back among the luxurious cushions of her carriage, keeping a sharp eye on all that passed in the street. No face that was worth while, escaped her keen glance.

Thus the day was spent until near dinner time when the young woman returned home where she dined simply. Sarah had returned for the evening, and after dinner, Alice had a long talk with her. The young woman was very well satisfied with what she learned. For the first time she examined certain papers that she had extracted from the pockets of the men who had pretended to arrest her, on the previous night.

It will be seen that Miss VanCamp was a skilful worker as well as a clever woman. Her plans were by this time well laid, and while she had not solved the mystery she had obtained certain information that led her to believe the solution would be reached ere many days had passed.

"I shall go out again this evening, Sarah," she said, after having finished the evening's duties.

"For the night?"

"Perhaps, I don't know. I have that matter still in hand. I look for some developments this evening."

"Be careful, dearie," warned Sarah.

Miss VanCamp laughed lightly.

"You need have no fears for me."

"But you do take such terrible risks."

"That is part of the profession, Sarah. Still, I am reasonably careful. When do you return, tonight?"

"Yes. I had intended to remain away all the evening, but now that you are going out I shall go back very shortly."

"Keep a sharp lookout. I hardly think it will be necessary for you to remain beyond the week's end. There is nothing further to be learned there that I do not already know."

Miss VanCamp, as Madge the Detective, soon after that, took her departure. Her first visit was to a well-known music hall where the men and women of the underworld did congregate. There she met Courtney Sangster. The young man was in gay company, and having a glorious time. Madge took pains to attract the attention of Sangster. But there was no look of recognition in his eyes as he gazed admiringly at her. It was plain that he did not believe he had ever seen the woman before.

Miss VanCamp chuckled softly to herself. It was a compliment to her skill that he had unwittingly paid her.

For an hour or more the detective remained in the music hall, observing carefully all that went on about her. She saw many faces that interested her, some well known criminals. None of them appeared to be acquainted with Sangster, which gave the girl a new line of thought.

During the evening one of the men who had arrested her on the previous evening appeared. It was evident that he was looking for some one. Yet though he looked at Madge he did not recognize her. Her appearance had been changed from the previous evening.

From that to other places the young woman journeyed, remaining a short time at each stopping place.

It was late in the evening when finally she turned her footsteps to the little house where Agnes had

found a refuge. First taking a survey to make sure that she was not observed, Madge let herself in with a key, and proceeded down stairs to Mrs. Gates' apartments. The woman was still up.

"How is Agnes?"

"Well and contented. She is in her room."

Alice made her way upstairs. Somehow the house seemed to her to be deserted. She paused just outside the young girl's door, listening. All was silent within.

Alice opened the door and stood gazing in. The room was brightly lighted, but there was no one there.

"Gone!" muttered the young woman. *"What does this mean?"*

CHAPTER XXI.

TURNING THE TABLES.

"What does this mean?" muttered Madge.

For a moment longer she stood gazing into the room. Then she stepped within. A faint aroma filled the air, smiting her nostrils familiarily.

"Chloroform!" muttered the girl. "So that is the way of it, eh? I wonder how they got wise to her presence here?"

With no apparent emotion, Madge went to the basement.

"When did the child leave the house?" she demanded.

"When did she leave? What do you mean?" replied the housekeeper.

"I mean that your charge is not here."

"Not here?" repeated Mrs. Gates, her face growing pale.

"No."

"Then she has run away."

"No, she has not run away. She has been taken away."

"You—you don't mean it?"

"I do. Some one has entered this house, chloroformed the child while she lay sleeping on the divan, and abducted her. Have you heard any noise this evening?"

"N-n-no."

"How long ago did you see Agnes?"

"I think it was an hour and a half ago."

"Where?"

"In her room. She said she was going to lie down for a little while, but that she would not undress as she rather thought you might be in during the evening."

Madge nodded.

"I cannot understand how any one could have gotten in and carried the girl away without your having heard them."

"It must have been while I was in the cellar."

"When was that?"

"Oh, something like an hour ago. I was doing some work down there, knowing that the girl was in her room and all right. You see, I had no reason to feel worried over her, knowing just where she was."

"I am not blaming you, Mrs. Gates. We are dealing with some very shrewd men. But what disturbs me is, how did they know she was here?"

"I don't know, unless perhaps, they followed you here."

"They did not follow me here?" replied Madge, with a firm compression of the lips. "The girl must have showed herself at a window or something of the sort. She has not been out, has she?"

"Oh, dear me, no."

"Then she has been seen at a window. I am sorry. It complicates matters considerably at this stage of the game."

"What shall you do?"

"Why, go find her, of course."

"But you have no idea where they have taken her?" protested the housekeeper.

"No, but I shall know, I shall find her, never fear, and I shall go about doing so first of all, before I attend to any of the other matters that are pressing me."

"I—I hope you find her. I feel that I am to blame," muttered Mrs. Gates.

"Do not worry. All will come out right in the end. Be sure to double-bolt the doors after I leave the house, and do not open them under any pretext unless you get the proper signal. I am going up to my room to dress. In the meantime go to the observation room and make sure that there is no one watching this house. It would be strange if some one were not."

The detective went to her room, first having examined the lock carefully to make sure that no one had entered there. It was a lock that the ordinary crook would not be likely to succeed in picking, being of peculiar and unusual type.

Satisfying herself on this score, Madge entered and proceeded with her dressing. This time she worked a complete change in her appearance.

Half an hour later a slender young man emerged from the house, Mrs. Gates having assured her mistress that the street was clear. Madge, in her new disguise, looked like a youth of sixteen or eighteen, and a very handsome boy she made. Her hair twisted into a small knot was hidden beneath a soft fedora hat. Her delicate hands were gloved by loose fitting gloves, that could be withdrawn instantly and that only slightly impeded the action of the fingers.

Madge made her way directly to the second avenue house. Some instinct told her that this was the most likely place to go. She reasoned that, had Warwick caused the girl to be kidnapped, which undoubtedly was the case, he would not have Agnes taken directly home.

Whether or not that reasoning was correct, the reader will learn very shortly.

Miss VanCamp passed the house on the opposite side of the street. The shades were tightly drawn, but from under one she saw a faint glimmer of light.

"Some one is at home," murmured the girl. "I shall have to proceed with extreme caution. But I am going to get into that house, whatever the risks I take."

The young man, or girl, as it was in reality, turned back at the next corner and upon reaching the house, dodged up the steps noiselessly and so quickly that even though one were looking out of the window he might have thought it a mere shadow.

Madge was at the door. There she crouched, listening at the key-hole. She could make out no sounds from within. For several minutes the girl maintained her position there, then drawing a key from her pocket, she softly unlocked the door, opening it ever so little.

As on the previous evening, the hall was in darkness. But, from an adjoining room, she could hear voices. The door to that room was closed. The detective listened attentively, but could make nothing out of the conversation being carried on within.

Drawing her flash-light, she looked about her. There was nothing in the hall to claim her attention. Madge turned and made her way softly up the stairs. All was quiet there. Several closed doors greeted the flash from the hand lamp. She tried each of these cautiously, each yielding to her touch, until she had reached the lower end of the upper hall.

There she encountered a locked door.

"This promises something, even if no more than rousing some one out of bed," she murmured.

The detective unlocked the door and opened it. The room was in darkness. The flash lamp shot a slender ray about the room. Miss VanCamp uttered an exclamation.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

As stated at the close of the preceding chapter, Madge uttered an exclamation of surprise. Forewarned as she was, she was not prepared for the sight that met her gaze.

On the low divan lay the figure of Agnes Warwick. The girl was gagged and bound. But this was not all. The eyes were open wide and staring. She might have been dead, for all signs of life that were observable.

The eyes of the detective flashed menacingly. With a spring she was at the side of the unhappy girl. A hand laid over the latter's heart, and Madge uttered a chuckle of satisfaction.

"The poor child is laboring under the influence of some powerful drug. I must get her out of here and give her attention at once, or I may be too late."

The next question was how this should be done. There appeared to be but one way, and this way the detective determined to follow, namely, carry the unconscious girl out.

Miss VanCamp stepped out into the hallway where she stood listening for a few seconds. There were no disquieting sounds, so she returned to the room. At first, she was about to remove the gag and the bonds.

"No, it is not best," decided the woman. "She may moan and thus arouse the others in the house. I shall have to leave her as she is for the present."

Freeing her revolver and placing it on the table, Miss VanCamp, with apparent ease, lifted the girl from the divan, placing the unconscious figure over her shoulder. The detective did not even stagger.

Next Madge picked up her revolver which she carried in the right hand, and with her burden and weapon ready, descended the stairs to the lower hall.

Behind the closed doors were heard the voices of two or three men conversing. Madge imagined that she recognized the voice of Spindle Warwick, but she could not be sure.

She managed to get the front door open without attracting attention. Reaching the outside, she cautiously closed the door, then hurried down the steps with her burden.

The rest was not so easy. Were passers-by to observe the woman carrying a bound and gagged girl over her shoulders, trouble might follow, at least, inquiry, and the woman detective did not wish to be delayed by anything of this sort, for time was precious.

She hurried on until she came to a drug store around the corner on a cross street. There she quickly made herself know to the druggist, exhibiting her authority and stating her wants.

While the druggist was telephoning for a taxicab, Madge was removing the bonds from the unconscious victim. The cab reached the store in record time. The druggist assisted in placing Agnes in, then at the risk of being stopped by traffic policeman the taxi tore down town fairly humming over the smooth pavement in Fifth avenue.

The cab drew up before Alice VanCamp's own home. The driver was paid his regular tariff, with an extra allowance for keeping his mouth shut.

Alice bore her burden up the steps of her handsome home and a few minutes later, laid the child in her own fresh sweet bed. In the meantime, a physician

had been hastily summoned. He pronounced the girl to be suffering from an overdose of some powerful drug. It was fully two hours later when Agnes awoke from her death-like sleep.

At first the child was too dazed to take account of her surroundings. At last she fixed her eyes inquiringly on those of her friend.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"In my own home. This time you will not be disturbed. But do not try to think or talk. You must rest for the remainder of the night. In the morning we will have a long talk. I have much to say to you. I will leave you in good hands. Have no fears, your troubles are nearly at an end now."

"How did I come here?"

"I brought you here."

Madge saw that the girl had no recollection of what had happened to her. The child had been asleep when she was overpowered by her abductors and probably did not even know that anything of the sort had taken place.

Madge retired to her library and there telephoned to a well-known detective, a friend of old, requesting him to meet her at a certain place within the next thirty minutes where she would pick him up with a cab.

This done, the woman paid another visit to Agnes, after which she hurriedly left the house.

Bob Collins was the detective friend. To him she explained her plans, briefly sketching the history of the case that she was engaged upon.

"You say you want me to keep this man until you are ready to make disposition of him, Madge?"

"Yes."

"Why not hand him over to the police?"

"It may be possible to avoid the publicity of it. I want to spare my friends if possible."

"Very well, it shall be as you say. Will he be alone?"

"If he is there, he probably will be. I hope he is not, for I want to do something."

"Anything I can help you at?"

"Yes. If the man is not at home, I want you to stand guard outside while I make my investigations. I reckon I know where I want to look. I had that pretty well sized up last night."

Shortly after that the young woman ordered the cab to halt. The two detectives alighted. They were a block from the home of the man Warwick. Madge led the way. The two spoke in subdued tones now.

"We will go up together, then we can make our arrangements afterwards."

Arriving in front of Warwick's door, the pair halted, taking turns at listening at the door. All was silent and dark within.

"I think the coast is clear. Stand aside while I pick the lock," announced the resourceful Madge.

With scarcely a sound save a single faint click, she performed the operation of picking the lock. An interval of silence followed. Madge opened the door, throwing a flash into the room from her lamp.

"It is all right. You remain near the head of the stairs. If he comes up, down him and put the irons on. I shall not be long."

"Very well, you may depend upon me."

Miss VanCamp entered the room, closing the door behind her. For a moment she remained in the center of the room, flashing her light about.

Suddenly she started forward and pulled a couch from the wall.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CLOSING IN.

The instant the couch came clear of the wall the slender white hands of Alice VanCamp ran over the cloth backing.

"I saw him looking at it. His eyes kept continually wandering to this piece of furniture and I was sure—Ah!"

A knife quickly ripped through the tough canvas that backed the couch and the hands of the detective were thrust in deeply. With a triumphant chuckle the detective drew forth a metal box.

"This is indeed good fortune."

It was good fortune. Quickly opening the box and flashing her light into it, the box burst into a perfect blaze of light.

"The missing jewels. I knew I could not be wrong," murmured the wonderful girl. "Now for the man. I hope he doesn't keep us waiting long. I have still much to do before the morning. I——"

A warning tap on the door, signaled her that someone was approaching. Madge quickly thrust the box into her pocket, buttoning a flap over that the box might not slip out in a scrimmage, then sprang out into the hall.

A man was heard hurriedly running up the stairs.

"It is he. Wait until he gets a foot or so ahead then land on him!"

Warwick dashed by. He was going for the jewels. He had discovered the fact that his daughter had been kidnapped from his other hiding place, and he knew that a powerful enemy was upon his track.

Suddenly Warwick measured his length upon the floor. A billy thrust between his ankles had done the

business. The male detective was upon him in an instant. At the same time Madge was down on her knees and before the desperate crook knew what had occurred, she had clapped the irons on him.

"Help me carry him down."

A few moments later and Warwick was in a cab being hurried toward Bob Collins' home. There he was placed in a cell in the basement and there Madge Nelson the Detective visited the man alone.

"The game is up, Spindle," she smiled.

"What game?"

"This!"

Madge held up the box of jewels.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Madge the Society Detective!"

"O, Lord help me, I am undone!"

"You are."

"I'll make you rich if you will let me out of this."

"I can't be bribed, Warwick. You should know that without my telling. However, there may still be a way out. I want you to tell me everything, make a clean breast of the whole affair. To save my people publicity I may be able to set you free, providing you will clear out and never show your face in America again. Now talk."

Warwick did talk. He talked, led on by the skilful questioning of Alice VanCamp until the first streaks of dawn shot through the grated window of Bob Collins' cellar.

It was then that Madge took her leave. Going directly home she found Agnes up and dressed, pale, but with a smile of welcome on her beautiful face.

"I am so glad you have come, dear?" breathed Agnes. "I want you to tell me all that happened last night."

"No, not now. But I will say that I think this will prove the happiest day of your life. What would you say, were I to restore you to your real parents?"

"I should be the happiest woman in the world. But you—you cannot mean it."

"It is possible. I shall not promise. I have something to do yet before I can be certain. If you will excuse me I will hasten on to the final chapter of your wonderful history.

An hour later found Alice closeted with Mr. Sangster.

"Well why this early call?" he demanded jovially.

"To report progress."

"What progress have you made?"

"This!" Alice placed the box of jewels before the astonished broker.

He was speechless with amazement.

"When you have recovered from your surprise I wish to ask you some very personal questions. I think I have earned the right to do that."

"Indeed you have. I too wish to ask you some questions. Proceed."

"Did you ever have a daughter who was lost to you?"

An expression of pain passed over the face of the broker.

"Yes," he answered in a low voice.

"What became of her?"

"She disappeared one day when about eight years of age. We have never seen her since."

"That would make her about eighteen years of age were she alive now?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Sangster, what would you say were I to tell you that I had found your real daughter?"

"My God, you can't mean it!" exclaimed the broker, springing from his chair.

"But I do mean it."

Mr. Sangster's agitation was so great that he could not speak for a few moments. He paced back and forth during the time, then turning to her, said:

"Bring her to me! My God I can't stand this uncertainty!"

"Carry the glad tidings to your wife and by the time you have composed her, I shall have the young woman here. Be cautious, do not break the news too suddenly," she warned.

Nearly an hour later Madge entered the drawing room of the Sangster home with a veiled girl at her side. Mr. and Mrs. Sangster were awaiting them there, standing in the middle of the room, their faces ghastly in their pallor.

Agnes began to tremble violently.

"My dear remove your veil," requested the sweet voice of Alice VanCamp.

The girl did so.

"My daughter!" cried the father and mother in one voice as they sprang to the side of the long lost child, clasping her tightly in their arms.

Miss VanCamp discretely withdrew to another room. There she remained for more than an hour. Finally Mr. Sangster entered.

"Alice words fail me. I can't say a thing that I want to say."

"Don't try," said the smiling Miss VanCamp.

"I must. I want to know what all this means? There is something almost uncanny about it. Who in God's name are you that you work such miracles?"

"I think you know me pretty well?"

"I thought I did, but I don't."

"Can't you keep a secret?"

"I can."

"Then listen. When my father died I was forced to earn my living. I followed my natural bent and took up detective work. That in brief is the story. I have been at the work for some years now and in that time have earned a reputation and fortune for myself. I have of course acted under an assumed name. No one knows me in the profession as Alice VanCamp."

Mr. Sangster had listened in speechless wonder.

"Who in Heaven's name are you when you are at work then?"

"I am known as Madge Nelson, Detective," answered the girl smilingly.

"Good Lord, is it possible!"

"Yes, but there are other things to be discussed. I must tell you the whole of this miserable tale and leave you to act as your best judgment dictates."

Alice did tell the story, not sparing a single detail nor minimizing the part that the man Rex Chapin, otherwise Courtney Sangster had played in it. She did impress upon the broker that Courtney was not a bad boy at heart, and advised that he be sent abroad to straighten himself out, otherwise, to inform him that he would have to suffer for his crimes.

Mr. Sangster was not long in deciding. He even went so far as to give Spindle Warwick a liberal bunch of money to take him to the far corners of the earth.

"I owe him that for making it possible to recover my daughter," said the broker. "He did not steal her. He picked her out of the street. If he had been the man who kidnapped her, I should kill him."

And so it was left. Courtney was sent abroad after a stern talk both from his father and Miss VanCamp, to return a few years later a changed and better man. Agnes was united with her family and took her rightful place a few months after the reunion. At first her return caused a great sensation in the social set where the Sangsters moved, but the real story was never known. The maid was released from prison on the following day.

Alice VanCamp had won her greatest case. She had triumphed and she had brought happiness to several people, but Madge the Society Detective neither was offered nor expected a fee for her splendid work.

THE END.

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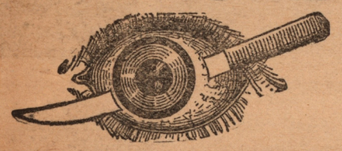

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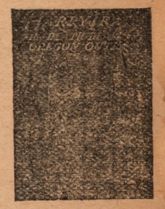

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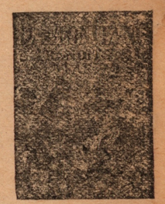

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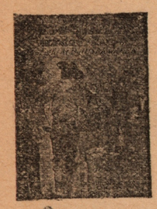

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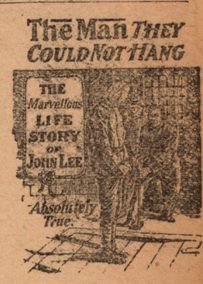

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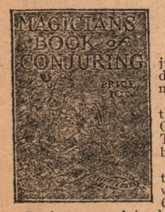

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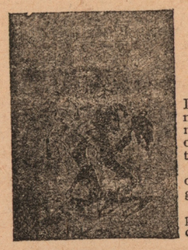

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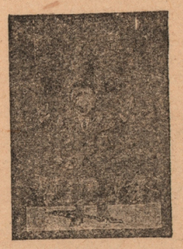

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No. 2. TRACKED TO HIS LAIR ..... or The Pursuit of the Midnight Raider
No. 3. THE BLACK DEATH ..... or The Curse of the Navajo Witch
No. 4. THE SQUAW MAN'S REVENGE ..... or Kidnapped by the Piutes
No. 5. TRAPPED BY THE CREES ..... or Tricked by a Renegade Scout
No. 6. BETRAYED BY A MOCCASIN ..... or The Round-up of the Indian Smugglers
No. 7. FLYING CLOUD'S LAST STAND ..... or The Battle of Dead Man's Canyon
No. 8. A DASH FOR LIFE ..... or Tricked by Timber Wolves
No. 9. THE DECOY MESSAGE ..... or The Ruse of the Border Jumpers
No. 10. THE MIDNIGHT ALARM ..... or The Raid on the Paymaster's Camp
No. 11. THE MASKED RIDERS ..... or The Mystery of Grizzly Gulch
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13. Trapping the Counterfeiters; or The Lightning Detective on the Trail.
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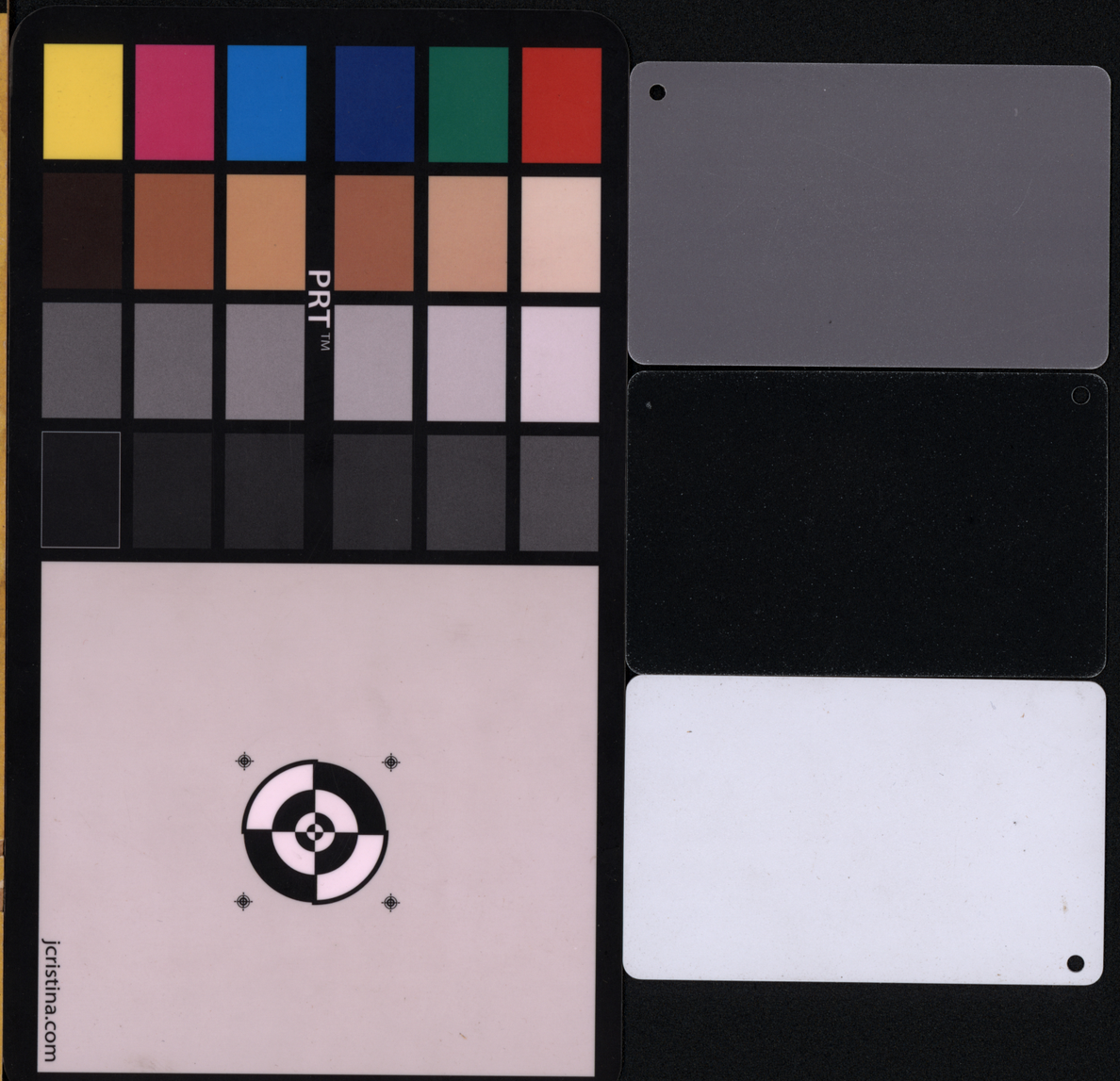
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